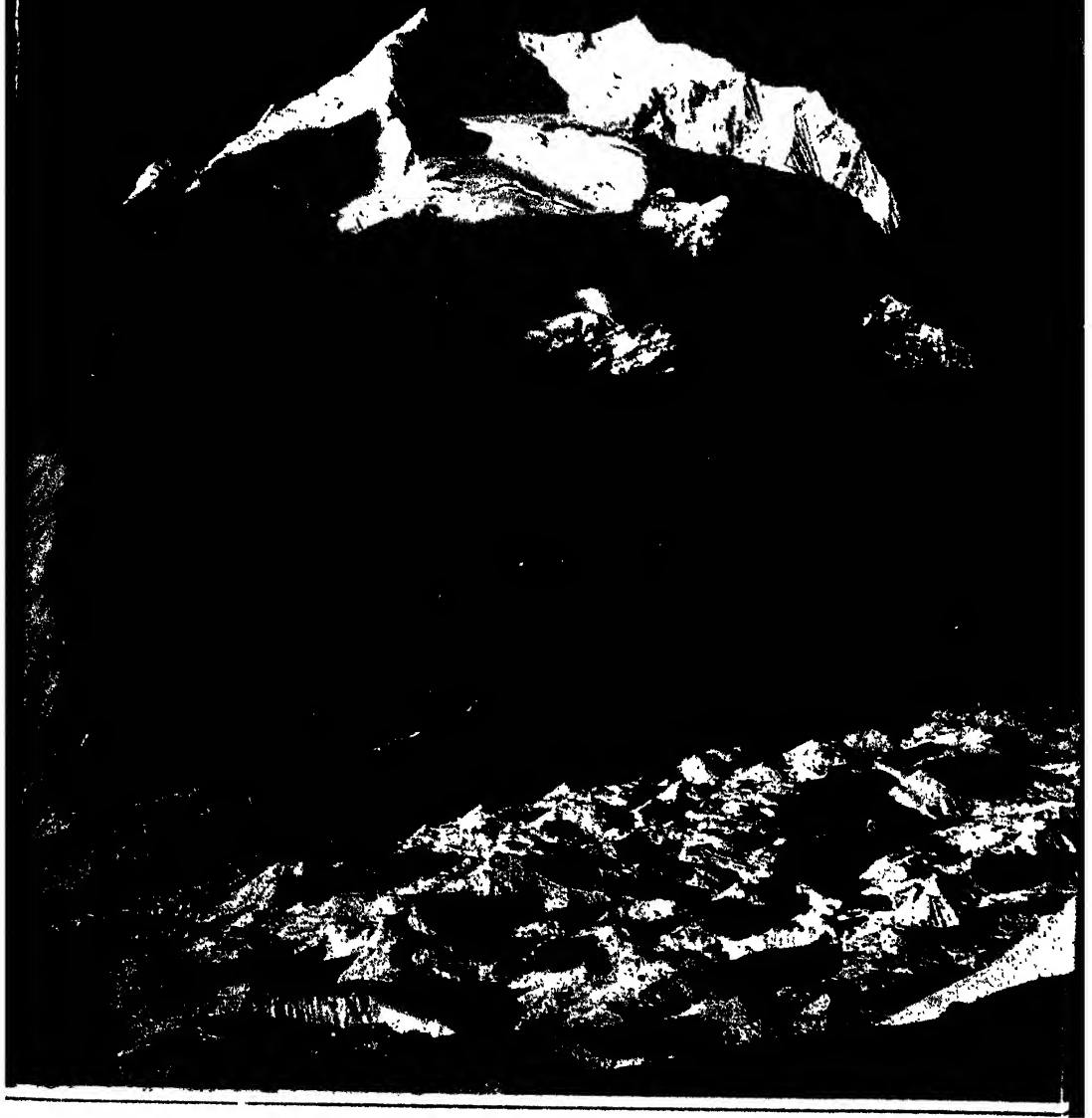


High Himalaya Unknown Valleys



HARISH KAPADIA

Foreword by
CHRIS BONINGTON, C.B.E.

***High Himalaya
Unknown Valleys***



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High Himalaya Unknown Valleys

HARISH KAPADIA

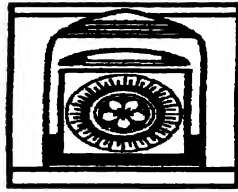
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**For
Bhagwandas Kapadia
who never stopped me
and
Jagdish Nanavati
who always encouraged me**

I Hold the Heights

I have not lost the magic of long days;
 I live them, dream them still.
Still I am master of the starry ways,
 And freeman of the hills.
Shattered my glass, ere half the sands had run—
I hold the heights, I hold the heights I won.

Mine still the hope that hailed me from each height,
 Mine the unresting flame.
With dreams I charmed each doing to delight;
 I charm my rest the same.
Severed my skin, ere half the strands were spun—
I keep the dreams, I keep the dreams I won.

What if I live no more those kingly days?
 Their night sleeps with me still.
I dream my feet upon the starry ways;
 My heart rests in the hill.
I may not grudge the little left undone;
I hold the heights, I keep the dreams I won.

—Geoffrey Winthrop Young

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Foreword

You get to know someone especially well on an expedition, particularly in the event of a crisis. On Panch Chuli in 1992, we certainly had our share of crises, when Stephen Venables had an eighty metre fall while descending Panch Chuli V. In the subsequent rescue, working with Harish Kapadia as co-leader of the expedition, we built a strong friendship based on trust, respect and enjoyment of each other's company. In spite of the crisis, it was one of the happiest expeditions I, or for that matter all the other members of the team, had ever undertaken.

Harish Kapadia, as this book shows, has an extraordinary knowledge and experience of the Himalaya. He is a mountaineer in the classic mould, both traveller and pioneer, with a deep interest in the history, legends and people of the Indian Himalaya. As editor of the *Himalayan Journal* he has been able to bring this breadth of knowledge to make the *Journal* the most full and authoritative channel of Himalayan information, available today.

Some of the most attractive mountains in the Himalaya are amongst the lower peaks in the 6000 metre range. The Indian Himalaya is particularly rich in this respect with a wealth of hidden valleys, superb peaks and complex glaciers that have barely been explored by mountaineers. In his story he takes us off the beaten track to places where few climbers have ever been and where, if you want to follow in his footsteps, you would probably have the mountains to yourself.

Climbing with Harish is a delight! His sharp, yet gentle sense of humour, helps keep the team together. He has been climbing and exploring with a group of friends from Bombay for the last twenty years; he has also employed the same group of porters from Manali and Kumaon area, inspiring in them a strong loyalty. He is also profoundly fond of his food. On Panch Chuli, the cuisine was excellent, and the approach to the mountain a delight. A few days in Bombay

were spent in exploring the best of Gujarati cuisine, whilst making final arrangements for the expedition, and on the journey through India to the foot of the mountains, every opportunity was taken to savour the best of regional cooking.

His planning and organisation are superb. He has that deft touch, where the team members are barely aware of all the work that has been done, everything runs so smoothly. *High Himalaya Unknown Valleys* takes the reader on a journey that is both delightful and immensely informative; as enjoyable as the expedition I was lucky enough to share with Harish.

CHRIS BONINGTON

Preface to the Second Edition

It is heartening to note that the Second Edition of this book is required within nine months of its publication. Many climbers, reviewers and researchers have shown keen interest in this book. As the reviewers mention, it was well received by the critics as well as the general readers. I am grateful to all of them.

This book covers treks and climbs in the Himalaya undertaken by me from 1969 to 1991. They have been arranged in the order of the areas; for the chronological order of years see Appendix II at the end.

Most of these articles first appeared in the *Himalayan Journal*, though they are updated for the present book. Three articles are specially added.

The popularity of this book shows that the interest in the Himalayan trekking and climbing is shifting towards the unknown. The new areas in the Himalaya, which I was lucky enough to explore, are now attracting many mountaineers. The sport of climbing higher peaks will certainly go on, but at the other level these middle-height peaks will form the basis for strong climbing pleasure of the future. This would be a healthy development for the sport. It can be enjoyable climbing the middle-Himalayan peaks, or simply exploring new valleys. The next decade will attract more and more people to these lovely areas.

Coinciding with this development is the new approach of 'openness' by the authorities, at least in India. Many areas have recently been opened for all and access made possible. The restrictions of 'inner line' have been eased considerably. Quite large parts of the western Himalaya and the Garhwal are now open to all mountaineers without a nationality bias. This should lead climbers to disperse, explore and climb in different areas having less impact on the ecology as such.

Most of the sketch maps were drawn for the *H.J.* by Arun Samant. The line drawings are specially prepared for the book by my

wife Geeta Kapadia. For this edition I have added a few sketch maps, revised the text and added some original references in chronology. In the past volumes of the *Himalayan Journal* where most of these articles appeared first, many photographs and panoramas are printed. It was for this reason that photographs are not added to this book for they are too many and are available in the *Himalayan Journals* if required. Perhaps at a future date a separate book for each region with pictorial reference can be published. This would allow for detailed reference and complete coverage. At present, readers may refer to the *Himalayan Journals* for photographic reference.

My grateful thanks to the Himalayan Club for permission to use material from the *H.J.* Naren Nanda and Dhiren Toolsidas have helped me with the correction of the proofs and with various suggestions. For this edition I have to specially thank Ms. Rashmi Palkhivala who has not only corrected the text but also offered valuable suggestions. My publisher M.L. Gidwani has been most co-operative and open to many ideas. This I hope reflects in this edition.

It is an honour to have the foreword written by Chris Bonington, now a good family friend and someone I shall always admire.

Since the expeditions and treks covered in the previous edition (till 1991) I have already undertaken five more trips to the Himalaya. The adventure in the Himalaya has been a constant thread running through my life. I can't seem to be able to keep away from the range. Everytime there is pressure of work and life I feel tempted to go back to the mountains, be it the local hills over week-ends or to the Himalaya. My favourite poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz best expresses this state of affairs in an Urdu couplet:

Phir Nazar Me Phool Mahake, Dil Me Phir Shama-e-Jali
Phir Tasavoor Ne Liya, Us Baz-Me Jane Ka Naam

'Again there are flowers in my eyes, again there is a fire in the heart and again the imagination has run wild to call me to the fold of the mountains.'

HARISH KAPADIA

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Note. All maps are drawn by Arun Samant

All sketches are by Geeta H. Kapadia, except No. 5 by Arun Samant and
No. 8 by Jagdish Nanavati.

My Himalaya: An Introduction

The fact that many a man who goes his own way may end in ruin means nothing. The only meaningful life is a life that strives for the individual realisation, absolute and unconditional of its own particular law.

—Carl Jung

For me, the attraction for the mountains developed slowly. There was no love at first sight. Living in a congested area of Bombay till I was 28, I could have missed the mountains totally. The area, like the city, was noisy, crowded and polluted. But all of this perhaps acted as a catalyst that drew me to the freedom of the hills, for a little distance away were the hills of the Western Ghats, or the Sahyadris. A strange attraction developed for this range since my young days.

I was almost 15 when the second series of rock climbing training courses were to be held near Bombay in 1960. I enrolled for the four-day course. Nawang Gombu, who was to go on to climb Everest twice, in 1963 and 1965 was my instructor. He was lively and tough. We were three students under him. During the course he grilled us thoroughly, so much so that I was scared of high, serious rocks for a long time. But the foundations for very safe and sound techniques were laid. The other instructor with him was Ang Kami. With his liveliness and exuberance, he became a good friend instantly. Thus my grooming as a mountaineer started with these two famous Sherpas, for Ang Kami was to become the youngest person to climb Everest in 1965.

To join this course there was a briefing. I entered the room as a young school boy, and a man who sat in immaculate Indian dress

stared at me through his light handsome eyes. It was soon evident that he was thorough and enthusiastic beyond his mild-mannered talk in Gujarati. This was my first introduction to Jagdish Navavati. He was the inspiration behind organising these training courses. With his Gandhian upbringing, he had high values and organising powers, both of which rubbed onto the youngsters who came into contact with him. I was continually guided by him all along in the future years.

As I entered college, my first trip to the Himalaya was undertaken. This was in 1963 and I was 18 years of age. Little did I realise then that till the age of 48, as of now, I would visit the Himalaya as many times as my present age; trekking, climbing and exploring. As I stood in front of the Pindari glacier then and looked at Nanda Devi, a deep attraction was developing. For the next four years I continued to trek to the different areas of Kumaon, Garhwal and Nepal during the summer vacations. This was the most enjoyable period. With little planning one could walk out with an old rucksack, a blanket and a leaky tent hired from a club. From the crowded areas of Bombay, this feeling of freedom was total.

For the first six years, I had one constant companion, Zafar Vasi, who studied with me in school and college. He loved to be out in the hills and the light-hearted company we shared made the mountains most enjoyable. He loathed any form of organisation or training. He refused to use ropes or arfy gadgets, proudly calling himself a 'pure' trekker. He continues trekking regularly in the local hills and in the Himalaya today in his pure style.

On our first trek to the Himalaya, Zafar and myself had carried a square tea-chest to pack kitchen utensils. This was loaded on a mule. On the second day of our trek, the mule was disturbed by the noise made by the utensils in this tea-chest. The box was dropped and would have been broken but for a middle-aged man who came from the opposite direction and saved it. We hired him to carry the box the rest of the way. This was Pansingh, the sturdy local porter. For the next 15 years he accompanied me wherever I went in the Himalaya. When he was too old, his younger relatives and people from his village came along. On my last trip in 1992, the two Harsinghs who carried the loads were there because of this providential meeting with Pansingh in 1963. These sturdy villagers from Kumaon have served me very well and added to the success by their care and trust. If a letter is sent to them a month or so in advance, they will appear at the appointed place in Delhi to accompany my team anywhere. In 1985

between three of them they literally carried the entire expedition luggage after ten Ladakhi porters had deserted the team. Later, I added Pasang Bodh and Yog Raj as two high-altitude supporters, from Manali, Himachal Pradesh. Both have climbed many peaks with me. These proud and sturdy chaps have contributed to the fun and success in large measure.

In 1992 on Panch Chuli, one of them, Harsingh Jr. had climbed bravely in oversized boots to help in the rescue of Stephen Venables. As a reward, the British wanted to sponsor him for a training course in India or in Europe. When repeatedly asked whether he would go, his only reply was: 'At present I want to go back to my sheep. They have been unattended for a long time now'

In 1964, I joined the 'Basic Training' course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling. Sherpa Wangdi Norbu was my instructor. He was the champion of Lionel Terray. He talked of his first ascent of Jannu, of being on Makalu and Annapurna. With the Swiss team on Kedarnath he was left alone for a night after being injured while the rescue was being organised. He had cut his throat to die, thinking that he was deserted. Along with the training, these talks from him and other famous Sherpa instructors laid the foundations to my knowledge about the history of mountaineering and about other mountaineers.

Along with Wangdi, Nawang Gombu and Ang Kami, now my good friends, were there to make the joy complete. As we returned from the 45-day course at Yoksum, the Indian pre-Everest team met us. This team included all the would-be famous names in Indian mountaineering. The selection was done then for the 1965 Indian Everest expedition team, when 9 Indians reached the summit. Capt. M.S. Kohli, Col. N. Kumar and others I met there as a young student, continue to be my friends today. Raymond Lambert, the famous Swiss mountaineer, was present as a personal guest of Tensing Norgay. He offered us whisky from his stock if we presented a damn good campfire. No doubt we students won the bet on that memorable night, which ended late with many sprawling near the embers and Dorjee Lhatoo singing a *guzal*. The friendships made then, as with Col. Prem Chand (of Gorkhas), have lasted me a life time.

As most Indian mountaineers are advised to, I went for the 'Advance Training' course in 1967. This included climbing a peak and organising an expedition. I was a student at the newly formed Nehru Institute of Mountaineering. After many days of training, we

attempted Bhagirathi II (6512 m), climbed only once, by the Austrians in 1938. Finally, Vallabh Meghpara (who unfortunately died in 1968 while rock climbing near Bombay) and I reached the base of the last pinnacle, led by instructor Jamait Sinh Rana. The two of us sat down at the base as Rana climbed unroped. His hands touched the final slope when we saw him last. He suddenly fell to the snows below but landed safely. We could have easily gone up again. But not being sure that this was the summit, we retreated with him, badly shaken. To our regret, when we saw a picture of the first Indian summiters of this peak a year later, they were standing atop the same pinnacle. We had missed the ascent by 30 m of easy ground.

Next year, the University of Bombay organised an expedition to Kumaon. As the Chairman of their Hiking and Mountaineering Society, I was an organiser and member of the team. After various struggles I was standing on the peak Ikualari (6059 m) on 29th May 1968. This was the first time that I stood on a Himalayan summit. As I looked at the Nanda Devi peaks again from the summit, the resolve to climb was firmer.

During the decade of the 1960s, Indian mountaineering was under the patronising tutelage of the government. There were only a few expeditions which had not depended on government grants and support. The Indians had climbed Everest in 1965 but there was not much enthusiasm for the smaller peaks or newer areas. Social attitudes treated the activity as almost suicidal. Consequently, a successful mountaineer was treated as a hero and he in turn looked for promotion in his job and other rewards. Thus many were trained at the courses but without a government sponsorship through the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, not much was being done. The I.M.F. 'selected' a team on a 'national' basis. This was something I always wanted to avoid and, instead wished to climb with my own group. With this thought, I have all along avoided the large sponsored expeditions. That meant smaller peaks and new areas within limited means. It has been fun all the way and brought excellent results too.

The first such venture was to the Sunderdhunga valley. Jagdish Nanavati supported the plans as a friend but was reluctant to sponsor the team as the President of the Climbers Club, Bombay, to which we all belonged. To the Club, mountaineering was a gentleman's sport where one had to spend from one's own pocket and not through others. Finally, we young members won the arguments against the almost Victorian attitudes, and the earliest sponsored expedition was

born to attempt peak Tharkot (*see Article 11*).

Zerksis Boga and myself had trekked and climbed regularly in the hills of the Sahyadris. As he lay injured, near death, on Tharkot, I had stayed with him. Once down he recovered and we formed a strong bond of friendship. We went on most trips together till 1985 when he migrated to the U.S. for greener pastures. With his lean and strong frame he put in excellent climbs like Chiring We and Sudarshan Parbat, the former not repeated yet. Everything seemed possible with Zerksis. He was the one who came down the crevasse to rescue me in 1974. During the two-man trip to North Sikkim in 1976 (*see Article 13*) we hardly talked to each other. The beauty was staggering and we as friends knew each other too well.

After the tragic accident on Bethartoli Himal and its aftermath (*see Article 4*) we gave up active association with the Climbers Club. It was a blessing in disguise, seeing it with the benefit of hindsight. Jagdish became active in the Himalayan Club and today he is the longest serving Hon. Secretary of the Club with international membership. With other friends like Vijay Kothari and Dr. Pravin Shah, I formed our own club 'The Mountaineers, Bombay' in 1973. With the independence that it gave us in the Indian mountaineering set up, it continues to support all our plans. When the window was closed, doors were flung wide open!

The injury on Devtoli in 1974 (*see Article 7*) almost crippled me. Walking for two years on crutches was an experience which had a human face. Suddenly, I was noticing all the persons walking with crutches on the road. The human face of a hectic city like Bombay was seen during these trying times. Friends and well-wishers supported me through it all. What I have learnt in these two years of human kindness is a rare treasure. I often wonder how on earth I continued with the Himalayan climbing after this. Losing a friend in rock climbing accident in 1968, falling in an avalanche in 1969, facing the tragedy of the deaths of four friends in 1970 and a serious personal injury in 1974. The Himalaya were testing me.

In 1977 we tasted the first failure. An earthquake, poor teamwork and difficult terrain summarily defeated us on the Kalabaland glacier. But returning there in 1979 (*see Article 10*) was another success story.

Till now all my trips had been to Kumaon, Garhwal, Nepal and Sikkim, I had not seen the trans-Himalayan barrenness. This prompted me on a trek to Ladakh and Zaskar (*see Article 23*). With just one other companion, Bhupesh, we crossed many valleys and covered 520

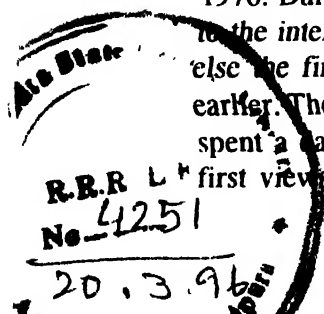
kms in a long push. It was a wonderful experience and later on I was to visit these areas many times. I had tasted my first *momoes* and Tibetan tea.

During the late 1970s, I ventured to write a guide book *Trek the Sahyadris*. This was the first and only book giving routes in the local hills, forts and pinnacles. Based on my personal experiences, it was an authentic record of the area where none was available, particularly as all the maps were (and still are) restricted. It became an instant success and by now the fourth edition is in print. Thrity Birdy had worked hard on this book. While I was injured and was on crutches for two years she encouraged me with the writing and supported me. She was a reputable mountaineer herself. It is only due to her untimely sudden demise in 1979 that we did not climb together more in the Himalaya.

The first writing and publishing experience led to much more. Soli Mehta, Hon. Editor of the *Himalayan Journal (H.J.)* was proceeding abroad for a few years. The Journal needed a mountaineer editor. I was approached, with R.E. Hawkins as the assistant editor. Hawk had a life long publishing and printing experience but he insisted on playing the assistant in the mountaineering journal. I took over the editorship after persuasion from Jagdish, and now *H.J.* has become a part of my life. With Hawk and Soli (later on his return) I forged a good bond and learnt a lot and enjoyed a lot. Both passed away in 1989 within three weeks of each other. *H.J.* has been hard work since their deaths.

But, again, fate played its hand. A French student named Jean Rene Odier came to Bombay for studies. I met him accidentally and we trekked together in the Sahyadris. This association led to the first international expedition for me. We joined the French to climb Sudarshan Parbat (6507 m) and other peaks (*see Article 5*). Though Jean himself could not join us, his brother, Bernard Odier, was my co-leader and we continue our association to date.

Like the French, many others visited Bombay over the years. The earliest visitor was Ian Clough on his way to Annapurna South face in 1970. During the week-long stay, he imparted training and exposed us to the international scene. Unfortunately, he died on the expedition or else the first Indo-British expedition for me would have been much earlier. There was a chance to interact with famous names. Noel Odell spent a day at home in 1974 and saw my slides of Nanda Devi, the first views of the peak for him after his first ascent in 1936. When



asked why he did not write an autobiography, his reply was: 'Let's say I am not a public entertainer. My experiences are too personal for me'. There were many others, Heinrich Harrer, T.H. Braham, Doug Scott and Aamir Ali, just to name a very few. And of course most of the members of the joint international expeditions I participated in, stayed with us. My balcony has housed almost ten Everest-summiters, to cool them in hot Bombay! These visitors shaped ideas and we shared a lot of camaraderie.

Somehow I have been more fascinated by the unknown valleys and areas than with climbing peaks. Many peaks were climbed only to obtain a better perspective of the unknown terrain. In this age of satellite photography, there are areas in the Indian Himalaya which are not seen by human eyes at close quarters. One such valley was Lingti in eastern Spiti. We explored it partly in 1983 and finished the explorations in 1987 (*see Articles 19 and 20*). These explorations were some of the most satisfying trips I have undertaken.

On these later trips my main companion was Muslim Contractor. We had trekked together in Darma valley and had enjoyed crossing the difficult passes. Now in these trans-Himalayan areas he came into his own. For such difficult, long explorations, there is no better company than Muslim. When in his element (with his pipe), he can turn a depressing barren trans-Himalayan terrain into green pastures. In fact he enjoyed barrenness so much that later in Kumaon he was heard complaining about the greenery of the *bugiyals*. After the death of Hawk and Soli, Muslim joined me as the Assistant Editor of the *Himalayan Journal* and the *Newsletter*. We have enjoyed almost a decade of mountaineering and editing together now.

I have been following the Scottish Himalayan expedition (1950) routes to the different areas of Kumaon and Garhwal. Working with the *H.J.* one liked to follow its pages and the trips recorded in it. In 1988 it was Girthi ganga (*see Article 2*) exactly on the Scottish route, with some variation in the valleys thrown in. When we were rained-out on Danu Dhura, we were following the route suggested in *H.J.* Vol. XIII, going backwards to the route suggested by Hugh Rutledge in *H.J.* Vol I! Though we failed, the pass was reached in 1992 by another team from Bombay. It has been a pleasure to suggest such plans to other teams and give support by way of information and photos. Many new areas that we opened have been visited again and based on the knowledge brought in, many teams have flourished. My second book *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* was written by Soli Mehta and

me in 1988, to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Himalayan Club. It contains most of the unknown areas and peaks explored by me. This passing on of knowledge and experience is a satisfying, continuing tradition.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Indian mountaineering continued to grow, but not always in the desired directions. The pre-occupation with huge expeditions, Everest and 'nationally selected' teams continued. Some expeditions landed up with bureaucratic problems and some with quarrels. They had nothing to do with the previous history or future vision. But there were a few which broke new ground. More than giant teams, my respect will always be for those small teams which climbed in a new area. With climbers of many nationalities approaching the Himalaya, many challenging climbs were undertaken. But Indians took a minor part in these changes. Being independent of the official scene I was lucky to interact with many of them.

Some of the smaller peaks and areas of Himachal Pradesh are easily accessible. Here I could combine business with pleasure. Col. Jimmy Roberts used to finish his Friday evening army parade at Dalhousie cantonment and reach the foothills of the Dhauladhar by car for the night. I tried my 'cloth merchant version' from Bombay. I could arrange a business visit to Amritsar on a Wednesday. Next day a car would drop me at Dharamsala, 4 hours away. Friday and Saturday I could trek and climb up to the different passes of Dhauladhar. Coming down on Sunday, a taxi would ensure catching the night train to Delhi. A Monday morning flight would see me at my shop by noon, turning me into a cloth merchant again. Expanding the idea into a week long trip, a lot was done quite economically (*see Articles 14 to 18*). It could be a 'hurry hurry' trip to Kulti, a winter excursion to Kailash or Yada or a sojourn to Kinnaur. All pleasures were possible, who says that the days of the Raj are over!

Eastern Karakoram has been opened to mountaineers since 1984. But it had always been difficult to organise expeditions there. I had experienced the area in 1980. Going there with the British in 1985 (*see Article 24*) we had a lot to prepare. But it was worth it, as the final results were brilliant, and because of the friendships we made with Stephen Venables, Victor Saunders and Dave Wilkinson. On the Siachen glacier trip one of the chief achievements of the Indian team, apart from climbing, was to teach these Britons how to eat mangoes properly, in Indian style. If I had ever eaten mangoes like them in my childhood and spoiled my shirt, like Dave, I would have received a

serious scolding. Dave continued to wear his white shirt with mangoes spread over it for the duration of the expedition. This inspired Victor to write about the different techniques to eat mangoes in his prize-winning book. A new happy chapter of my life, with the British, was beginning. Stephen visited Bombay few times later and became a familiar name to Bombay mountaineers.

In 1989, we were faced with many problems (*see Article 25*), but with the experience gained by then, we made a successful trip to Chong Kumdan (*Article 26*) with Dave Wilkinson. These historic areas gave me a taste of army life too. For a man from Bombay this was something very unusual, but it enriched a different aspect of life.

In between these East Karakoram expeditions, I ventured to an area last visited by Dr. J.B. Auden, 51 years ago. The Mana gad and Trimukhi Parbat (*see Article 1*) was a wonderful trip. Everything that I loved in the Himalaya was there. The final execution of the trip was a delight.

And as 1992 approached, another Indian-British trip was planned, to the Panch Chuli peaks. I had seen these peaks in 1982 from the Darma valley (*see Article 9*), read about them and now undertook the happiest expedition there. Chris Bonington, the legendary mountaineer, was my co-leader and some great names in the world of mountaineering were part of the team. Going with Chris and the others was the *piece de resistance* of many years of climbing. From the Indian side, I had old trusted companions of many years. What better combination can one ask for. The words written by Chris Bonington in the report, after thirty years of climbing, should make every Indian proud: '... it was one of the best and most enjoyable expeditions that the team members have ever taken part in.'

With such a hectic 60-day trip, I thought I had had enough for the year. But there I was, off to Kedarnath valley for a trek, just like a good *paan* (condiments wrapped in a betel leaf) eaten to digest a heavy meal!

So it goes on. A lot to do and write about in the future.

I was married after the Bethartoli Himal expedition. Geeta and I had met while trekking in the local hills. She continued to trek in the later years. Far from stopping me, she encouraged me to go to the Himalaya. She supported me through the injuries and welcomed all the friends. She knew what happiness all this meant. My father, Bhagwandas, had never stopped me from going to the hills, looking after the business while I was away. Our two sons, Sonam and

Nawang, are named after my Sherpa friends and they love to be with nature. The family has welcomed mountaineers from the world over, and the home is always a hub of activity related to the mountains. In fact, everything surrounding me has been directed to the Himalaya and the Sahyadris. Most friends love to talk about it, share a trail or at least agree to suffer the repeated slide-shows. Of course I have non-mountaineer friends and business associates who consider me insane. During the day at work, selling cloth, one does not utter a word about the sport. It is the other hobbies like cricket, art-movies, plays, and classical music that lend a balance when in Bombay. This tight-rope walk between the chosen sport, family, business and other activities is quite a serious acrobatic feat in Indian society. I am lucky to have survived. In India, activities like mountaineering are not accepted easily, let alone understood. Many start young but give up after completing their education and later because of the constraints of work. More give up on marriage, some on suffering an injury. The survivors continue. I have been lucky to be a 'survivor'. Running a family business since 1969, being married in 1971, suffering injuries in 1974 and 1989, now I have no other barricades to stop me, except myself!

I have always wondered about one thing. Many friends who started with me over the years, loving the mountains with vigour, gave up suddenly. Not only did they give up going to the mountains but also reading about them, seeing slides or even talking about them. I have always wondered why? Mountaineering is a passion and, like all passions, either you have it totally or not at all. It is too painful to have anything to do with it, if it cannot be pursued in totality. Like a deep love affair.

I hope to continue with this passionate affair.

Garhwal Treks

There is always a certain element of risk in being alive, but—The more alive you are, the more the risk.

—Ibsen

There will be many who for the first time looked at the Himalaya from the *bugiyals* of Garhwal. I certainly am one of them. For almost the first decade of my Himalayan years, it was Garhwal and Kumaon that I returned to the most.

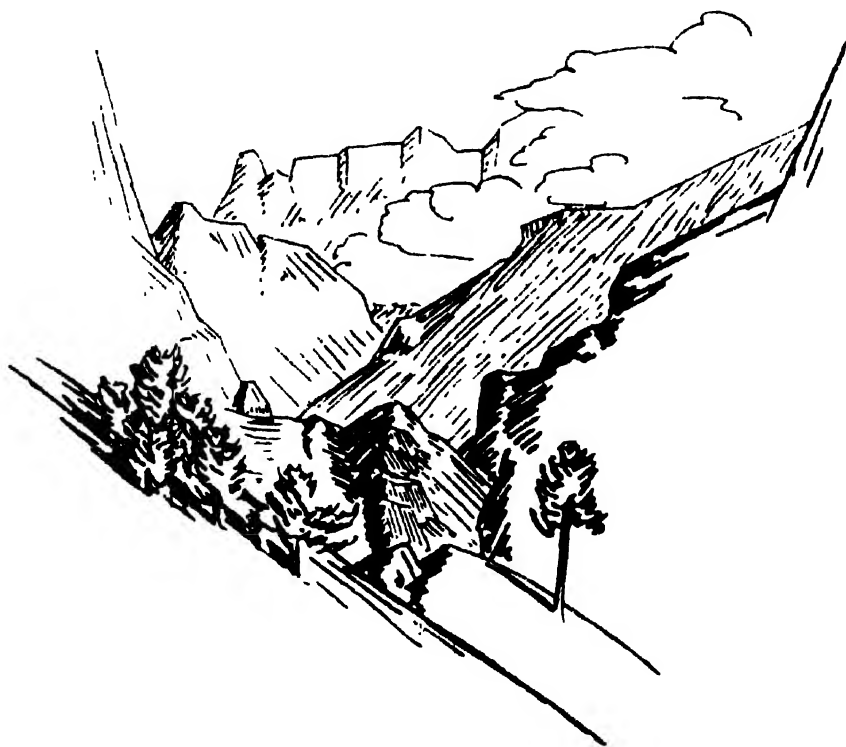
The trip to Jadh ganga valley had all the ingredients of excitement—an unknown valley, new passes and peaks, and of course the tracks of snow leopards. Preparing for a trip to such a remote area is an exercise I love. Corresponding with Dr Auden, managing the permits and the piecemeal gathering of information, is all a challenge. It all ultimately fits in, as a jig-saw puzzle does into a beautiful picture. My only other companion, Monesh, was young, enthusiastic and we matched well, as we should where only 'Two is Company'. Such a meeting of minds, strengths and interests is essential for happy two-men trips, which I have undertaken on at least three occasions.

Earlier, it was my other trusted companion, Muslim, who made the trip to Girthi ganga fun. It was a classic trip, like many I have undertaken. One treks in a main valley route, bifurcating to the side valleys, reaching passes, climbing peaks and covering great distances. And if you fail in the limited time in each valley, there is something else to look forward to.

On such varied trips no one could be a better companion than Muslim Contractor. His intellectual

frown, reading habits, uncanny topics for discussions, his pipe and even his unusual name make him unbeatable company.

A lot more remains to be done in Garhwal, in such styles and with such companions.



1

Two is Company

Explorations and Climbs in the Mana Gad

1990

IT IS SAID that two is company. So it was. Monesh Devjam and myself spent a month in the Mana gad valley, climbing peaks, reaching a new col and enjoying ourselves. We were supported by Pasang Bodh and Yograj Buruwa. But then, who says four is a crowd. Specially in a huge valley unvisited for 51 years.

Two was always company in this valley. It was in the early forties that Heinrich Harrer escaped from a British internment camp with the Italian General Marchese. They finally reached Nelang in the Jadh ganga valley before being caught. Harrer escaped again with Hans Kopp and met another twosome Peter Aufschnaiter and Bruno Treipel. Going across Jamuna and Algar valleys and over Nag Tibba they again managed to reach Nelang. Finally in two groups they crossed into Tibet across Tsang Chok la (5240 m) on 17 May 1944. Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet* journey had begun here secretly.¹

Even in 1990 perhaps the same access problem continues.

The reason for this lack of attention by mountaineers to this region has nothing to do with natural barriers.

The big obstacle is the 'Inner-Line' permits which we obtained by tackling the babus big and small!

So wrote the civil servant R.D. Bhattacharji during his visit to Jadh ganga in 1985.²

It is interesting to note this particular form of difficulty. To obtain

1. *Seven Years in Tibet* by Heinrich Harrer, pp. 3-34.

2. *H.J.*, Vol. 42, p. 49.

the coveted permits one has to deal with various 'initials'. First apply to 'I.M.F.' (The Indian Mountaineering Foundation) months in advance. They in turn will get clearance from the 'M.H.A.' (Ministry of Home Affairs) both at Centre and U.P. State, and from the 'M.O.D.' (Ministry of Defence). All this reaches the 'D.M.' (District Magistrate) whose 'J.A.' (Judicial Assistant) forwards it to the 'S.D.M.' (Sub-divisional Magistrate). He sends it to the 'L.I.' (Local Intelligence office) whose boss the 'S.P.' (Superintendent of Police) has to endorse it. So it goes on.

'None of your papers are here.'

The 'J.A.' was telling us coolly. Being battle-scared of many such 'I.L.B.s' (Inner Line Battles), I sent out select telegrams and went off on a four-day trek to Gaumukh to acclimatize.

The 'D.M. has the discretion to issue permits under section so and so. . . .' was the non-committal clearance received. The clerk was stubborn.

'The area is well defended, no one can be allowed there.'

'Why have you "defended" the area, for yaks and goats? At least we Indians who have all the papers, should be allowed to enjoy it,' we put forward.

It went on and on. Finally the young sympathetic D.M. put the issue beyond doubt.

'They want me to use my discretion. So I will use it. You two will go.'

Things then moved fast, the clerks were woken up to move papers and we had the permit in our hand. The secret, as always, is not to lose heart and pursue the bureaucrats till they cannot refuse.

It was on 17 May 1990, 46 years to the day after Harrer, that we left Bhaironghati (3400 m) having solved the access problem differently. We had 8 porters to see us through to BC and were accompanied by Z. Mistry and A. Popat for the first three days. A deep chasm is cut by Jadh ganga here while merging with Bhagirathi. The earlier path on the right bank was now nothing but wooden steps hammered into rock walls rising high above Jadh ganga. Now a motorable road (23 km) reaches Nelang (3650 m).

Nelang and Jadhang were the only two villages in this vast valley. Now both are evacuated for the last 30 years and people resettled near Harsil, just behind the ex-private Wilson's bungalow.

Both Garhwal and Tibet have exercised traditional claims from time to time over the Nelang area which

follows the Jadh ganga north-east of Harsil. Each country used to place boundary pillars on its frontiers, and these were periodically uprooted. The physiography of this region becomes increasingly Tibetan where the Himalayan crest-zone in northern Garhwal gradually gives way to the subsidiary Zaskar range bordering Tibet.³

To maintain a status-quo the people who used the village paid a house-tax to Tehri Garhwal and stock-tax to Tibet.

Now the entire valley is without any local settlement and the places of past glory are barren. At Naga (3640 m) 7 km ahead from Nelang, Jadh ganga meets Nilapani gad coming in from the east. The valley to the north of Naga leads up the Jadh ganga to Thaga la (5030 m) and Tsang Chok la (5240 m). In few easy stages via Dosindhu, Sonam, Tirpani, Pulamsumda one can follow Heinrich Harrer's route.

We proceeded along the Nilapani gad to Nilapani camp (3860 m). We had to cross the fast flowing Nilapani gad to go east along the Mana gad. It looked scary.

'No problem, you can jump across without wetting your shoes, an army Major told us with a thumbs up sign. We looked in disbelief at this baldish Major with the hint of a pot-belly. We scratched our brains at this. Others called it a difficult crossing. Next morning Monesh surreptitiously suggested to the Major that he show us the crossing.

'No problem.' He came along and stood at the edge of the fast flowing nala staring in for a long time. After a little while we were feeling cynical when he gave a thumbs up sign and quietly jumped to the rock in the middle.

'He is now trapped.' Monesh whispered. But another thumbs up sign and he leaped across clearly.

'No problem, come along.' Monesh and myself looked at each other, quietly held on to the rope the Major had fixed and crossed the water wet waist downwards and shivering. To top it, the Major jumped back and was gone in a flash with his thumbs up. The area is well defended with officers like him!

The area we had just entered, along the Mana gad, was last

3. *Himalayan Odyssey* by Trevor Braham, p. 82.

visited by J.B. Auden in 1939.⁴ Even in 1939, Nelang's people did not seem to ascend the Nilapani-Mana gad beyond this crossing. We went up 8 km on the right bank, crossed the Mana gad and made our BC at 4200 m on an alpine meadow. Now we were to be alone.

From Nilapani we turned eastward up the Mana gad. Old moraines, oxidized and crumbling like rotten slag heaps, flanked the oppressive gorge, and we arrived with relief at the top of one of the glacial steps formed during the pleistocene Ice Age, camping in the rain at 14,800 feet just west of Tridhara.⁵

This was J.B. Auden with Juin Singh on 12 June 1939. We were the next party on 21 June 1990, now establishing our camp south of Tridhara a little ahead of the turning. Tridhara, as the name suggests was the junction of three nalas: Mana gad from the south, Suraji gad from the southeast and Ghora gad from the east. It was a wonderful feeling. An entire valley to ourselves, lovely meadows with a hint of Tibetan borderland terrain and a profusion of peaks unobserved for years.

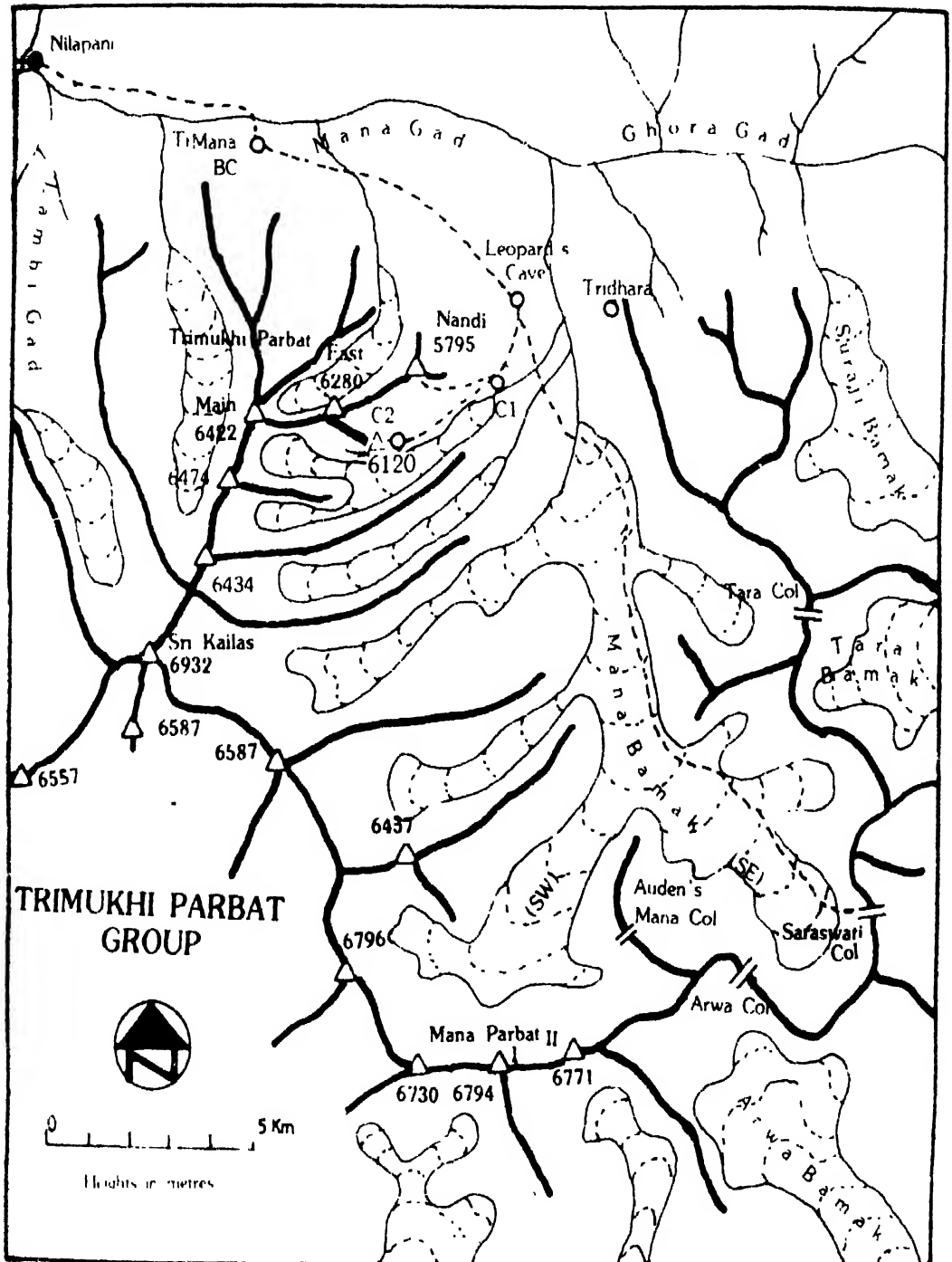
We were immediately introduced to the 'inhabitants' of the valley. Plenty of bharals were seen very curiously observing us, as if we were the endangered species. Bear tracks and footprints were spread all over. In fact as we travelled up and down the valley making fresh footprints everyday, another track was seen next to ours, that of bears as it is their habit, to 'smell-us' out. But the best of all were the footprints of snow leopards in various sizes and in profusion. Many were seen in the valley in general and our expert Pasang confirmed it. Monesh and I had delightful discussions about these footprints: whose they were, what would be the age of the animal, which direction it went in and what size it must be. Finally it always ended in a selfish deadlock; to determine whether the bear had followed his route or mine!

Our ABC (4560 m) was next to a huge outcrop of rocks with many holes, terraces and walls in it. Many leopard tracks were seen leading into it. We promptly named our ABC the 'Leopard's Cave.'

'Why not try to capture a leopard cub', the youthful exuberance of Monesh propounded.

4. See note at the end of the article.

5. *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 21. 'A Season's Work in the Central Himalaya' by J.B. Auden.



'I can keep it warm in my sleeping bag for a few days, like Auden.'

He was referring to Auden having found a wolf cub here. He had kept it with him, warm in his sleeping bag, for the duration of the trip. I did not want that sort of company in my tent.

'Have you thought of what the mother will do to you?'

'Hmm, let's see.'

With Pasang he left to explore the Leopard's Cave. It had narrow entrances, caves and terraces. Fearing an attack by the scared animal they climbed in from above. There were remains of the kill at many places like fur and bones. The droppings confirmed the nature of the occupants, who must have left for the higher grounds.

Above our camp we came across two huge survey cairns. These were certainly very old and built up with great labour. T. Kinney of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India has been recorded to have surveyed the valley. Up to 1875 very little was known about the valley here. It is T. Kinney's report in 1879 which brought to light many aspects of this valley including its tracks, peaks, passes, people and legends.⁶

Later, though few outsiders and many local traders and villagers travelled over the passes of Jadh ganga, none visited the Mana gad.

At the present time (1939) the Nelang people do not seem to ascend the Chungaumu (*Nilapani*)--Mana Gad beyond about 5 miles. My men live some months of every year at Nelang and none of them had ever been up the Mana (except one with the recent survey parties) or knew of the Muling pass ever having been used.⁷ (*Italics mine*)

From 24 May two porters started ferrying the luggage and two of us recceing the upper reaches. As we went up along the Mana gad, a large valley opened up. In the southwest many small valleys were leading to the various peaks of the Trimukhi Parbat range. We had to climb almost to the entrance of three valleys to determine the exact routes and valley we wanted to enter. The entire area was a complicated maze of valleys and sub-valleys. As we were too close to the mountains we could not see Trimukhi Parbat and all its peaks. Finally having determined the correct valley to enter, we established C1

6. *The Himalayan Gazetteer* by E.T. Atkinson, Vol. III, p. 338.

7. J.B. Auden in *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 21.

(5100 m) and decided to climb a peak 5795 m marked prominently on the map to our northeast.

This we did on the 28th, all four of us together. Leaving at 7 a.m., we were at the top in four hours of gentle climbing. But the vista it opened up and the knowledge about the valley it gave us was enough to satisfy us. We could see across to Sarup Choti (6100 m), the Tibetan plains, Tsang Chok la (5240 m) and all the northern passes. In the south was twin Mana Parbat (6794 m and 6771 m) and far in the distance were the Raktavarna valley peaks. In the southeast stretched the Mana gad with all its side valleys. All the surrounding peaks of Mana gad would be a future alpinist's delight, particularly the north faces of Mana Parbat peaks and the northeast face of Sri Kailash (6932 m).

Trimukhi Parbat (6422 m) stood proudly tall to the southwest of us. It was sharp and ice-pinnacle-like in shape. The possible approach could be via its eastern col which had to be reached via a long detour from the 'Trimukhi glacier's' southern bifurcation. Both, the duration of the approach and the technical difficulties of the final sections ruled out an attempt by us. To the east of Trimukhi Parbat was a good shapely separate peak, Trimukhi Parbat East (6280 m). It was straight up the valley by the northern branch of the glacier. Its steep gradients looked possible for us. We spent a delightful hour in excellent weather on the peak 5795 m which we named 'Nandi'.

Fortified with the knowledge of the area we finalised our plans for the final week in the valley. First it was to be a quick climb on Trimukhi Parbat East (6280 m). Accordingly on the 29th Monesh and Pasang were settled at C2 (5720 m) at the eastern foot of the couloir leading to its SE col. On 30 May leaving at 6 a.m., they first went up the gentle couloir to climb an ever steepening snow slope above. The final sections leading little above the southeastern col were almost 60° steep. The southeast ridge was reached at 9 a.m. Then it was straight-forward climb of 130 m to the summit, which was reached at 9.45 a.m. The first peak ever to be climbed in the Mana gad valley was ours! They enjoyed and photographed the view all around and left in half an hour. Now it was slippery terrain over wet ice-snow conditions. But using a combination of roped descent, glissades and slipping they were back to C2 in an hour where Yograj and myself had come up again to take them to the Leopard's Cave.

While in the valley, Auden had tried to open a new pass between the Mana gad and Arwa valleys.

From the new survey map 53 N/NW it seemed that there might be a possible col, about 20,300 feet in height, from the head of the south-west branch of the Mana glacier leading over to the Arwa glacier.

He tried to reach this col but at the top found himself between the two branches of the Mana glacier. But from this col he observed:

There is an easy col of 19,500 feet at the east end of the southeast branch of the Mana glacier, 4 miles to the east of which is Saraswati valley. We could have crossed that col, descended the Saraswati to the Arwa valley and reached Gangotri by the Kalindi Bamak, but as I was obliged to be at Gangotri on the 20th June in case of recall to duty elsewhere, we could not attempt this route.

We decided to reach this 'Saraswati Col' (5900 m) mentioned by Auden. Accordingly all four of us left with our camp travelling up the valley to the south along the Mana gad, along many prominent bear tracks. We crossed to the right bank and climbed up moraine outcrops, all the time turning to the east. It was a wonderful feeling noticing new valleys and recording them. At first we passed the Sri Kailash Bamak leading to the northeast face of Sri Kailash and then a huge amphitheatre of the southwest branch of Mana glacier leading to the formidable Mana Parbat peaks. Between the two branches of the Mana glacier the col reached by Auden could be seen. A little ahead a steep snow slope led to the 'Arwa Col' (6100 m) on the shoulder of the unnamed peak 6294 m. This is the col Auden actually intended to reach and which would lead to the Arwa valley. On our southeast was the valley which led to the 'Tara Col' (6000 m) which would descend to Tara Bamak in the east in the Saraswati valley. Camping at the entrance of this valley (4900 m—6 km) and the next day on the southeast branch of the Mana bamak (5500 m—6 km) we could see the 'Saraswati Col' (5900 m) as the prominent notch between the two peaks, 6190 m and 6020 m. On 4 June our long plod towards the col began at 5 a.m. The flat glacier, firm snow, changing vistas and excited companions gave us a feeling of exhilaration. We could feel perhaps, what drew the early explorers to the mountains. No wonder at the col (and even later) we both could exclaim that this was the finest experience.

The col, reached at 10 a.m., was a wonderful place. The entire Mana gad and Jadh ganga valley were seen in a different perspective.



Trimukhi Parbat: East (centre) and the main peaks.

On the southeast rose Kamet (7756 m), Mana (7272 m), Gupt Khal (5760 m) and a gentle route descended to the Saraswati valley. But the unforgettable view was that of the Mana pass (5608 m) in the northeast. We could look across the pass where people had travelled across for a century and wars had been fought. Grey brown hills across in Tibet in the north were clearly seen. Balbala (6416 m) climbed by Andre Roch in 1947 rose above the Mana pass. The intellectual satisfaction of this discovery and the view matched the physical labour and isolation. We could have easily descended to the Saraswati valley but the 'discretion of the permit' did not include that. How a piece of paper (and the consequences that may follow) could stop an exploration!

This col could be used as a pass between the Mana gad (Jadh ganga) valley and the Saraswati valley (Badrinath) which are otherwise very far away placed by road approaches. As far as we could confirm with the locals and the army, the existence of such a col was heard of but no one had yet reached or seen it.

Generally Monesh and I were a perfect foil for each other as a twosome. He always suggested a wild enthusiastic scheme and I exercised caution. Thus we usually arrived at the perfect decision. Now I failed and gave in to his suggestion to reach the Leopard's Cave straight from the Saraswati Col on the same day. This made us slog in the mid-afternoon sun on the soggy snowfield at first. Then having wound up the camps we had a walk up and down the dirty moraine with heavy loads and hungry stomachs. It was like the famous movie (on the Eiger) 'The Mana Sanction'. The porters barely managed to reach the camp by 7 p.m. Following them hungry and tired we were often caught in the flooded side torrents. The track seemed to stretch itself, as it always does when you are tired. Finally we were about to spend a night in the open with the cold wind when Pasang with a friendly torchlight guided us across the last torrent to the camp. In 18 hours we had gone up and down 24 km of high altitude ground. Like the movie, our trip had ended creating its own special climax.

We left the valley to its rightful inhabitants and in four quick days reached Uttarkashi on 8 June 1990. We visited Mahidanda, high up on the hills, 18 km from Uttarkashi, where our hosts the Indo-Tibetan Border Police had set up their headquarters. Surrounded by pine forest, it had a view matching their hospitality. Talking of leopards, the commandant narrated an interesting story. In winter their truck had to carry water from a far away stream where the driver found a leopard

cub. He brought the cub along to the camp. As the night fell, the leopard-mother started howling around the camp. For the next two days and nights she did not stop, despite the sentries' firing in the air. Everyone in the camp was kept on tenter-hooks and trapped inside fearing the leopard's attack. The leopard won her cub back safely and only then the camp could heave a sigh of relief.

Remembering our idea at the Leopard's Cave, I was looking aghast at Monesh, who, a little sheepishly, was looking the other way. A cub in the company of two would have been certainly out of place.

THE JADH GANGA VALLEY

Many have seen the rushing waters of the Jadh ganga meeting the Bhagirathi at Bhanoughati bridge. The valley lying to its northeast is the large valley of Jadh ganga and of its many tributaries.

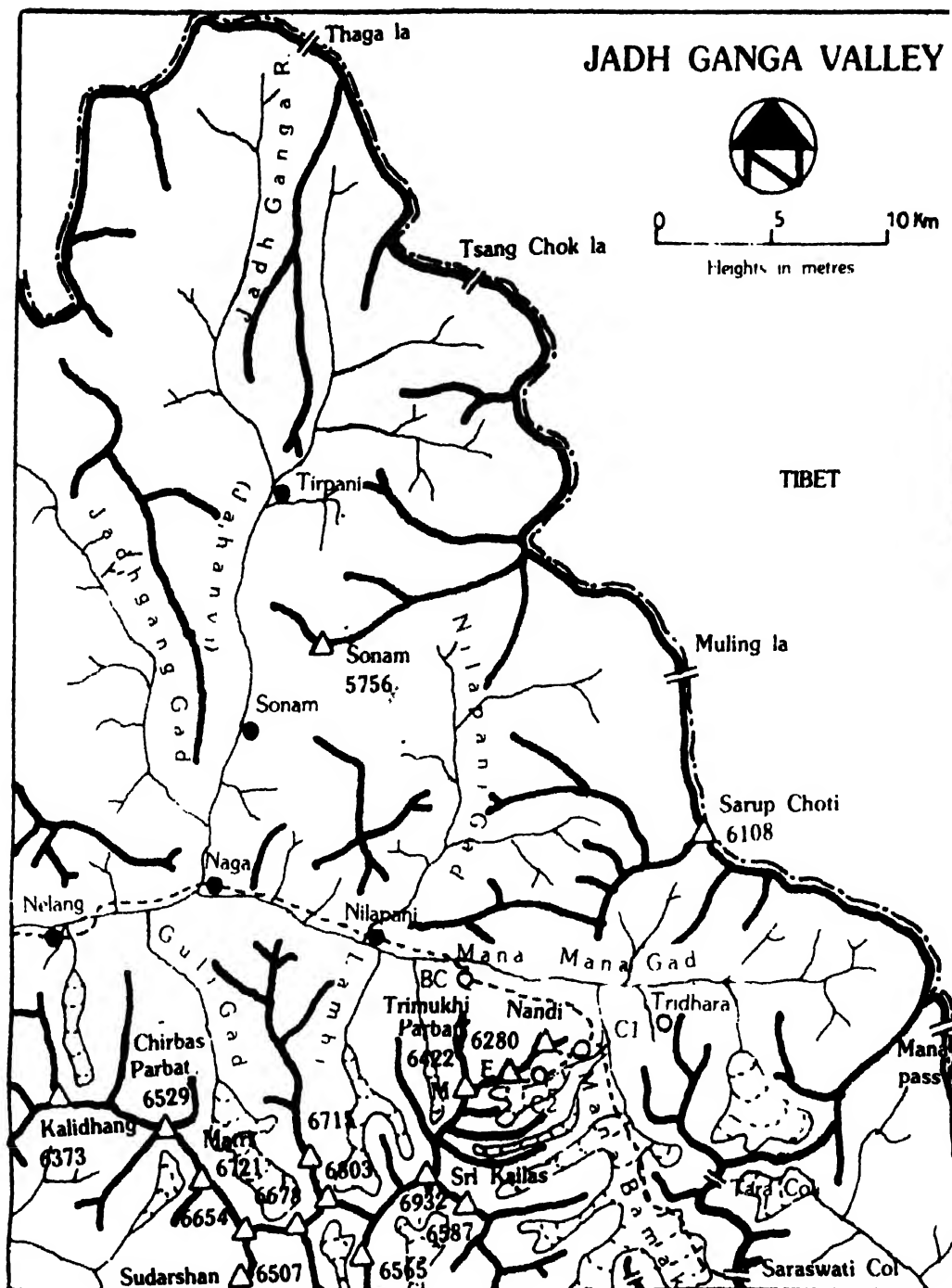
As one goes up the valley after 18 km at Dhumku, Chor gad (nala) drains the valley of the same name from the borders of Kinnaur and Tibet (NNW). 5 km above Dhumku is Nelang.

Nelang is one of the two villages in the valley, both now deserted. It housed the Jadh people giving the name to the valley. The area upto the village was claimed by the Chinese. The Jadhhs, like the Bhotias, were traders with Tibet.

The highest-lying villages in Garhwal, along the Tibetan border, are inhabited in the summer months by a semi-nomadic tribe called Jadhhs or, farther to the east, Bhotias. These people are typical frontier product, mixed racially and in tradition, who make the best of two worlds in any border dispute. The Tibetan half predominates in the Jadhhs, however, six days out of seven they are Buddhists and, when not wearing European cast-offs purchased while they are wintering on the edge of the Indian plain, they clothe themselves in Tibetan style, in summer they pasture their flocks and ponies in the uplands, or cross into Tibet to barter Indian produce for a consignment of salt or borax.

—*Peaks and Lamas* by Marco Pallis, p. 25

The trade was in cotton goods, metals, sugar, oil seeds going to Tibet in exchange for salt, wool, borax, to the value of about Rs.



62,000 in 1882 (which would be a considerable amount today).

A little ahead of Nelang, at Naga, is the confluence of Nilapani gad and Jadh ganga. Up north from here at Dosindhu, the Jadh hang and Jadh ganga meet. On the Jadh hang gad was a village of the same name. The original name of Jadh ganga is Jahanvi with an interesting legend narrated in the ancient Indian text of the *Puranas*. King Jahnu was disturbed by the whole place being flooded by the waters of the Ganga. He drank up the Ganga in anger which, by intercession of the gods was restored as his daughter; hence the river is called the Jahanvi. Jahnu's wife was Kaveri, who by his curse became the river Kaveri, which flows south of Madras in South India. Thus both mother and daughter are rivers. The connection between the Jadh ganga valley and Madras can be baffling like many ancient tales!

Further north the river thins out and the valley is distinctly Tibetan in character. The caravans traditionally met south of the passes at Mandi (bazar) for the exchange of goods. Some Indian caravans would go across to Toling or even to Gartok. Only the Jads were allowed to cross into Tibet.

12 km to the east from Naga at Nilapani, the Nilapani gad turns northwards leading to Muling la (5822 m) a much less frequented and more formidable pass. Towards the east from Nilapani is Mana gad which was rarely ascended.

Mountaineering and Exploration

Of the early explorers Griesbach surveyed the area between 1879-1883. T. Kinney of the S.O.I. gathered much information about the valleys. Of the many early travellers on the trade route were J.B. Frazer (1815), Hodgson and Herbert (1817).

In recent years H. Harrer (1944), J.B. Auden (1939) and Lt. J.F.S. Ottley (1939) are recorded to have been in the valley. After 1962, the Indian forces are permanently stationed in the valley in the north.

Mountaineering: The climbers were very few.

- 1974 *Kalidhang* (6373 m): 'Dutagar' team from Bengal (Asit Moitra) attempted the peak. (*HCNL* 30, p. 24).
- 1985 *Chirbas Parbat* (6529 m): attempted by a team from Delhi (R.D. Bhattacharji), (*H.J.*, Vol. 42, p. 49 and *HCNL* 39, p. 18).
- 1986 *Chirbas Parbat* (6529 m): first ascent by a team from "The Kangchenjunga Foundation", Calcutta (Indernath Mukherjee). (*H.J.*, Vol. 44, p. 84 and *HCNL* 40, p. 15).

1990 *Trimukhi Parbat East* (6280 m): first ascent, and Saraswati Col (5900 m), team from 'The Mountaineers', Bombay (Harish Kapadia and Monesh Devjani). (*H.J.*, Vol. 47 and *HCNL* 44).

NOMENCLATURE

The names that we came across in the valley have traditional meanings.

Jadh ganga: The river of the Jadh people who were the earlier inhabitants here and traded with Tibet.

Nilapani: The river of blue water. According to Auden. Tibetans called it 'Chunganmu'.

Tridhara: Meeting place of three nalas.

Trimukhi Parbat: Mountain of three faces. A colloquial name for Shiva.

Nandi: The bull Shiva rides. He generally faces all the temples of Shiva. In this case it faces Trimukhi Parbat.

Saraswati: The goddess of learning. The col of the same name leads to discovery and the Saraswati valley.

Tara: Star, or Goddess Tara of the Tibetans.

Lambi gad: Long river.

Sarup Choti: Peak with beauty.

Dosindhu: Meeting of two-rivers, here Jadh ganga (Jahanvi) and Jadhang.

Chor gad: Thief's gad (river), after a tale that this valley had secret routes to sneak into Kinnaur and Tibet.

Kalidhang: Black massif, which it is, rising above Nelang.

Chirbas: Place of 'Chir' tree. This peak rises above it.

Sri Kailash: Abode of Shiva.

Arwa: Peak looking like a horse. In Sanskrit literal meaning of Arwa is 'horse'.

Mana: The one which is worthy of respect (high). In *Oxford English Dictionary*, Mana: power, authority, prestige.

Jahanvi: River named after a royal daughter.

Nelang (or Nilang): Place of blue stones.

Naga: A place of difficulties (or after a rare snake-worshipping tribe Naga traced to the Garhwal).

Tirpani: Three waters (meeting of three nalas).

General references: *The Himalayan Gazetteer* by Edwin T. Atkinson (1882) and *A Gazetteer of Garhwal Himalaya* by H.G. Walton (1910).

Dr. J.B. Auden

Dr. J.B. Auden was the elder brother of the poet W.H. Auden. There were three brothers with John Auden being the middle one. He joined the Geological Survey of India and had travelled widely in many parts of the Himalaya and the Karakoram.

As per the records in the *Himalayan Journals*, he made several journeys in the course of his work or otherwise. In July 1933 Auden with Captain C.E.C. Gregory completed the survey of the Biafo glacier in Baltistan (*H.J.*, Vol. VI, p. 67). Then in 1934 he was in Nepal to study the effects of the great earthquake which caused havoc in Bihar Nepal on 15 January 1934. With D.N. Wadia, Dr. J.A. Durr, and A.M.N. Ghosh, he traversed large areas of Nepal and published an authentic record (*H.J.*, Vol. VII, p. 76).

In October 1935 he was in the Gangotri area of Garhwal with Dr D.G. Macdonald and three Sherpas. He explored the then unknown area. Here in 1939 he crossed a pass at the head of the Rudugaira valley to the Bhilangana valley in the south. This is now known as 'Auden's Col' and is not often repeated. He also explored the Jadh ganga, Mana gad and the Lamkhaga valleys (*H.J.*, Vol. VIII, p. 96 and Vol. XII, p. 17).

In a letter to me (3 July 1990) he mentioned this crossing 51 years ago.

This Col was crossed in 1939, by myself and two porters from Harsil hamlet, at the termination of two months travelling light, with tents weighing three kilograms.

I had been living rather primitively, and was anxious to make a short cut across the range, thereby saving several days. The north side of this Col was relatively easy-going, but the south side presented some difficulties in crossing the pinnacled ice.

Auden's most well-known trip was to the Shaksgam valley in 1937. This was in the company of Eric Shipton, H.W. Tilman and M.A. Spender, brother of another famous poet. Shipton makes detailed references to their journey in his autobiography while Auden recorded the geological results of the trip (*H.J.*, Vol. X, p. 40).

Dr. Auden was an Original Member of Mountain Club of India (1927) which founded the Himalayan Club. He served on the Club's Committee in 1936 and 1944, and was Vice-President from 1950 to

1953. He was an Honorary Member of the Club.

Dr. Auden concluding his letter to me wrote:

It is now thirty years since I retired from the Geological Survey of India, and I miss India very much. It would be a great pleasure to meet you, should you come to London.

How I wish London was as near as Jadh ganga valley from India!

Dr. John Bicknell Auden, aged 87, passed away peacefully in London on 21 January 1991. It was an honour to have corresponded with him and be advised by him to the Mana gad in the last year of his life.

2

In Famous Footsteps

A Trek in Central Garhwal and Kumaon

1988

*If we stop, we stand rooted like great mountains
If we walk, we sail through life.
We remember you at each step
and in doing so make you immortal.*

THUS GOES A COUPLET. The caravans to Tibet sang it in the praise of Madhosing Rawat. He ran a tea shop between the Unta Dhura and Jainti Dhura passes on the famous Tibet trade route. Carrying wood in this barren terrain from far away Girthi, he served food and tea to the caravans. Trapped between two passes in storms, many were saved by this labour of love. His legend is still embalmed in traditional song.

In the area of Central Garhwal and Kumaon memories of other explorers also linger. Many famous names have visited the area from the earliest of times and left behind many 'ballads' of exploration by way of articles and books. We decided to follow in some of their footsteps and re-live their adventures. And in doing so we hope to revive their memories along with many legends of these areas. Many small legends in the religious area give an insight into the simple faith of these simple people. These too are immortal, being handed down for generations.

While the earlier travellers had a long trek to reach Malari, we reached there by a motorable road comfortably via Joshimath. But nothing else had changed much, a sleepy village, mostly drunk by early evening, with small eating *dhabas*. At the outskirts was a giant walnut tree supposed to contain *chandan* (sandalwood) and it gave

that flavour to the walnuts. The motorable road goes ahead till '8 point'—8 km ahead, where it crosses Girthi. But at first we planned to follow the Dhauli ganga (Amrit ganga valley).

Amrit Ganga Valley

It was on 11 June 1988 that our little caravan left Malari for Gamsali (3300 m) a famous stop on the way to Kamet (13 km). Here the Amrit ganga, draining the 40 km long Bank Kund valley in the NW meets Dhauli. We went up the Amrit ganga valley to its head as it turned and twisted in various directions. At the head of this valley lies the Gupt Khal (5760 m), crossing over Alaknanda valley into Mana village. The presence of this famous pass had been suspected by A.L. Mumm in 1907, who named it the Secret Pass as it cannot be seen till the last slopes.¹ The successful Kamet expedition sought it in vain in 1931.² It was first crossed in 1937 by the surveyors R.C.A. Edge and R. Gardiner. Later in the same year Frank Smythe and P. Oliver used this pass on their way to the first ascent of Mana peak. This pass has been now reached a few times from the Alaknanda side to attempt Mana peak. Very few parties have crossed it from the Bank Kund valley. It is also known as 'Zaskar Pass' as it lies on the dividing line between the Great Himalayan and Zaskar ranges.

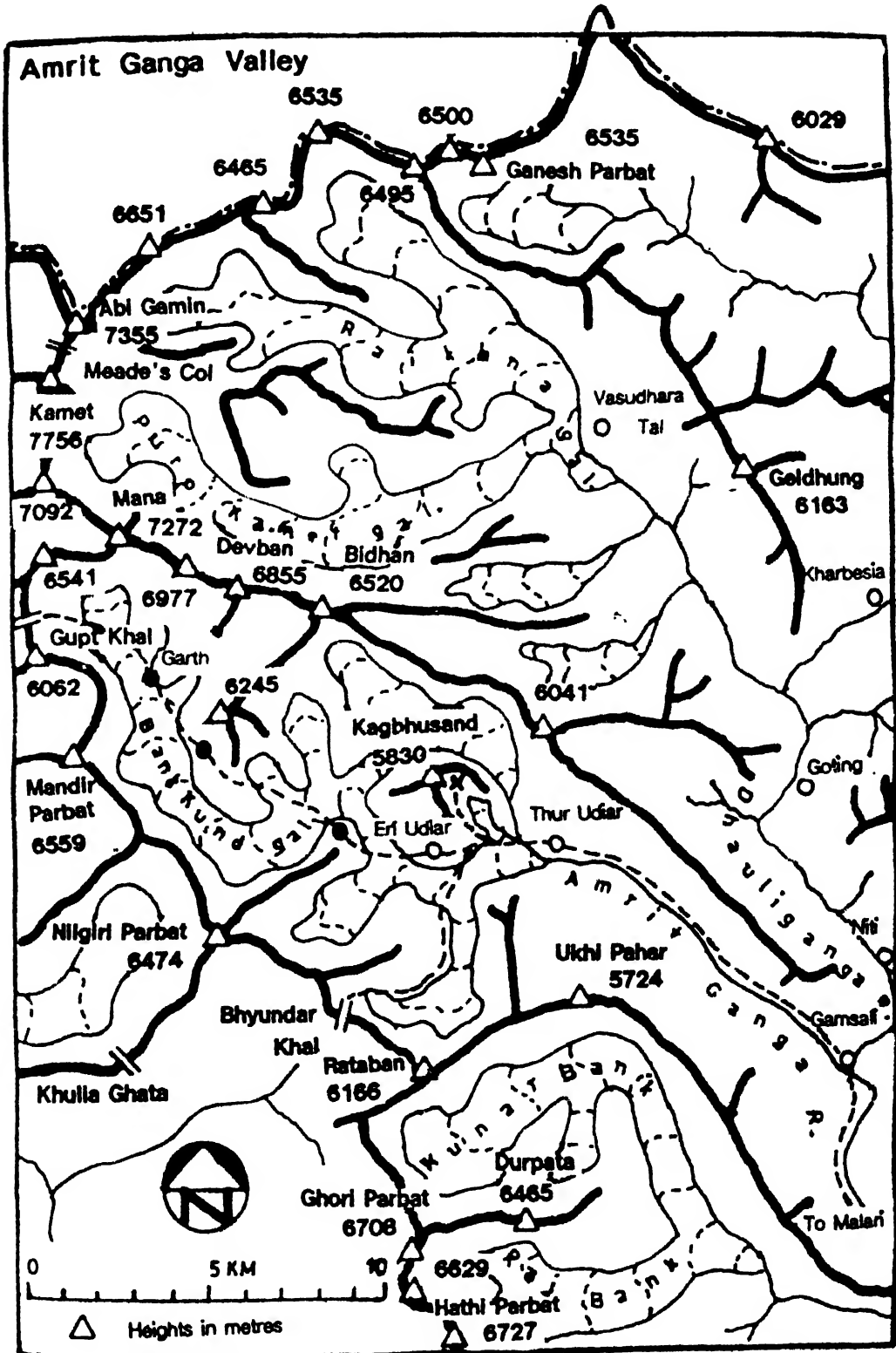
Going up the Bank Kund valley we reached Dumsain, a flat open maidan with a clear pond. Lord Badrinath, it is said, was eating here when he saw a dead bull, pointed out to him by a big bird 'Bampa'. He felt very upset and burst into tears. His *aansu* (tears) rolled down into the pond turning into stones. Round pebbles are still to be found here. However, Badrinath went away to settle in the Alaknanda valley and Bampa settled near Gamsali (village Bampa).

'For my part I would not readily exchange the exotic gardens of a Moghul Emperor for a sight of these little plants that lift their starry heads close to the eternal snows'.³ Thus wrote Frank Smythe of a ground between Thur and Eri Udiar where we established ourselves on the 12th. It was an idyllic camping site. A natural rock garden with flowers, turf, a small waterfall and a rivulet flowing in the centre. In fact now we were to follow his travels. Smythe had climbed up in the NW to the Devban plateau and climbed Pk 6435 m (later named

1. *Abode of Snow* by K. Mason, p. 266 and *H.J.*, Vol. X, p. 177.

2. *H.J.*, Vol. IV, p. 204.

3. *Valley of Flowers* By Frank Smythe, p. 188.



Bidhan Parbat) and Devban (6853 m). Then going up the valley he reached Gupt Khal. He traversed over a c. 6600 m (21,500 ft) peak to climb Mana, finally reaching Badrinath across the pass.

We decided to divide ourselves to follow three different directions. Allwyn and I left for Gupt Khal. 1 km ahead was Eri Udiar (cold cave)—a bleak place. Going across the glacier to the right bank they reached Bank Kund lake (4380 m) 6 km. It was a most beautiful site with turquoise blue water and soft green grass. A variety of chirping birds and a backdrop of an icefall made it a perfect setting. The next day after a 3 km climb on the moraine ridge, the rubble of the glacier had to be crossed again to the left and after a long day a camp was made below Garh (4870 m), 10 km, and on the next day we stopped on the glacier (5440 m), 6 km. On 17th we were ready to leave at 2 a.m. but a short hail-storm delayed departure till 7 a.m. The glacier was now flat. Behind rose the huge slopes of Nilgiri Parbat (6474 m), another 'first ascent' by Smythe in 1937. As they turned, Gupt Khal revealed its secret for the first time. It was a prominent depression. As we came nearer we could see some figures on the pass. An exchange of shouts finally established that it was an Indian army team on a recce of Mana peak. Helped by their fixed rope on the final 200 m, the pass was reached at 11 a.m. (5760 m), 5 km. It was great fun exchanging notes at that high altitude and an invitation to lunch at their camp on the Alaknanda side had to be reluctantly turned down. The terrain seems to have changed a lot since Smythe's time. The 21,500 ft peak to the north of the pass was a steep rocky pyramid. It cannot be used now, like Smythe did, to reach the upper plateau on Mana peak (7272 m).^{*} Mandir Parbat (6559 m) in the south had a steep dome of a temple with ice-flutings. Not an easy proposition. The view across to the west was closed hiding Nilkantha and Chaukhamba. The party returned to base on the 19th after one camp.

During this period Milind and Sher Singh had gone up to Bhyundar Khal (5090 m) opposite our camp. Keeping to the centre of the southern moraine coming from Rataban, they turned west. By 11.50 a.m. they were looking across the last crevasse on the pass, 7 km. In the early days, this was the entrance to the valley. C.G. Bruce, A.L. Mumm and T.G. Longstaff crossed this pass from Bank Kund to Bhyundar valley in 1907.⁴ According to Longstaff this pass was

^{*} The Indo-USA army expedition however followed the same route in autumn 1988.

4. *Abode of Snow* by K. Mason, pp. 118, 204.

probably crossed by Richard Straechy in 1848 and by Edmund Smythe in 1862. In 1931 after climbing Kamet, the entire team crossed over from here followed by Capt. Birnie later in the year. Smythe came over in 1937, naming the Bhyundar valley the 'Valley of Flowers'. In 1947 T.H. Braham⁵ and in 1954 Gurdial Singh⁶ crossed it. Now it is being crossed quite often. It is as much an easy passage as it is historic.

The other historic triangulated peak is of Kagbhusand (5830 m) guarding the entrance of Devban plateau. It has graceful shoulders supporting a delicately soaring peak. The top has a shape of *Garud* (eagle) whose other name is Kagbhusand. This peak is seen from a little above Gamsali, from Gupt Khal and even from the Girthi gorge. Thus it was an ideal triangulated point for the surveyors. A *garud* was listening secretly to Vedanta being recited by a sage at Kagbhusand tal (near Bhyundar valley). He was caught and cursed to be frozen as rock and all the crows were cursed to die, leaving their wings there. On 7 July 1931 on their way back from the first ascent of Kamet, Shipton and Holdsworth attempted it to within 100 m of the top, with difficult ice and rock work. Not to be outdone, Shipton paired with Nina Sherpa next day and managed to reach the top. Shipton called it 'severe' but he had climbed 1600 m each day to accomplish it.⁷ Only one more ascent is achieved on this in 1970 (by the Indo-Tibet Border Police).

Anni and Muslim established two camps on the SE side. The route climbed up a steep grassy slope to a depression below an icefall. From the left of it the upper Bank Kund plateau was reached. However, the peak rose very steeply here. No way could they figure out how Shipton had dashed up in a day. Perhaps the terrain has changed beyond recognition. Finally a day of bad weather helped them to make up their minds to give up and come down. They did not find the dead crows either! With this we wound up our camp and retreated to Malari on the 22nd. Now three members were left for the major part of the trip. Allwyn and Milind visited the Valley of Flowers from the west linking it up with the Bhyundar Khal. Dr. V.N. Desai trekked on the lesser known pilgrim trails to Bansi Narayan (4135 m), Rudranath (3610 m) and Tungnath (3680 m). This 100 km trek went through

5. *H.J.*, Vol. XV, p. 90.

6. *H.J.*, Vol. XIX, p. 7

7. *Kamet Conquered* by Frank Smythe, p. 245.

thick forests. Shipton in 1936 had descended from Satopanth glacier and had an anxious time in thick woods infested with bears, in the nearby Madhyamaheshwar valley.⁸ It was more remarkable for the fact that Dr. Desai was 70 years and with a lone porter who was 60!

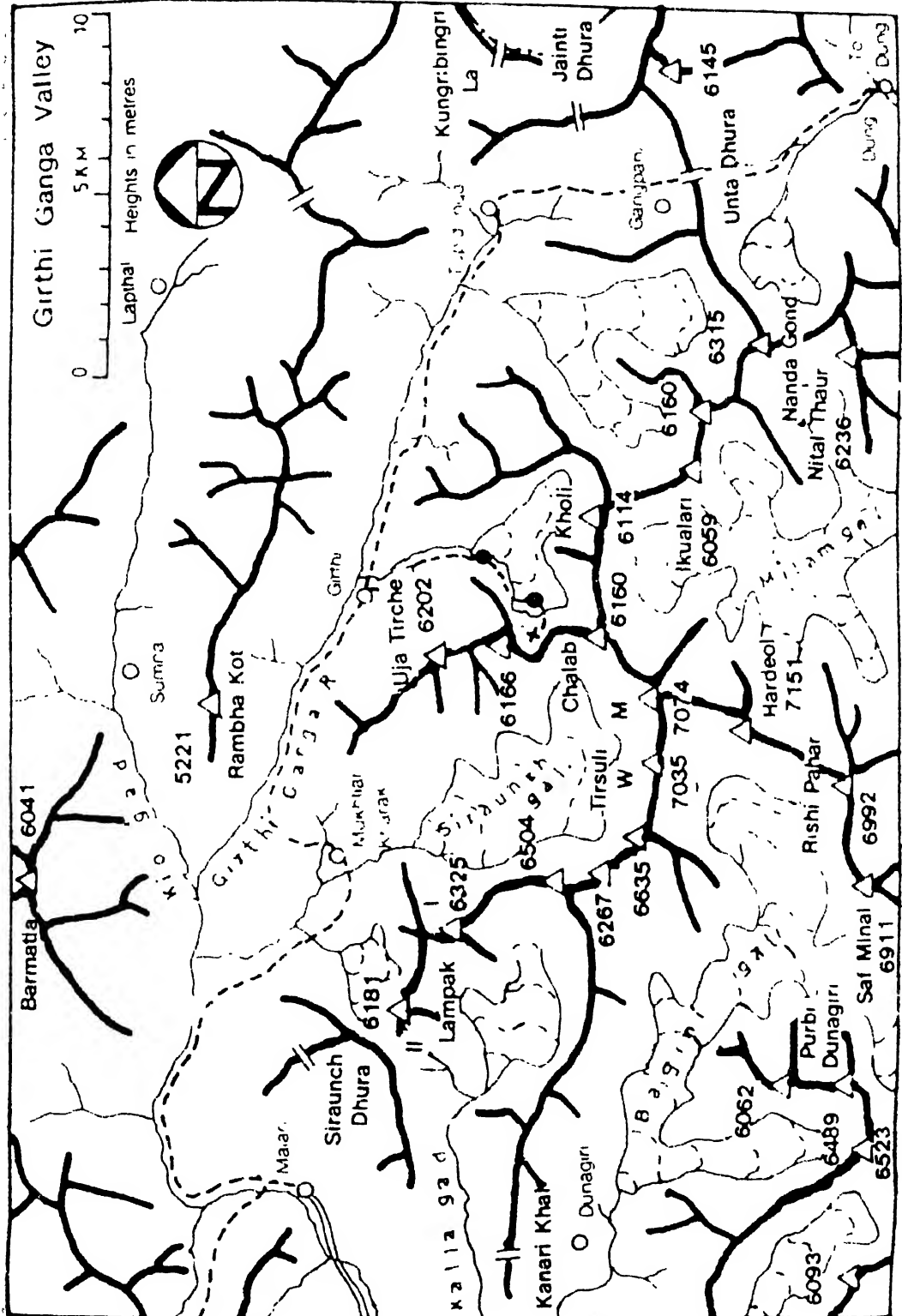
Girithi Ganga Valley

Girithi Ganga originates from two glaciers, both flowing north at first, west of Unta Dhura. Girithi east valley is broad, drains the glacier at the foot of Nanda Gond and its waters are black. Girithi west valley drains the glaciers at the foot of Kholi (6114 m) and Chalab (6160 m). From a narrow and highly crevassed glacier milky white waters gush out. Then it flows westwards forcing a way through the gorge to meet Kio gad at Girithi Dobala and merge with the Dhauli at Malari. This gorge was said to be first traversed by Dr. Kurt Boeckh in 1893. The next record of its traverse is by the Scottish Himalayan expedition in July 1950.⁹ During their long journey they crossed this gorge climbing Uja Tirche (6203 m) at its entrance. We decided to follow their foot-steps and explore the Girithi west valley which had had no visitors. The eastern valley is relatively broad and shepherds visit it.

On 23 June, we left the windy and bleak '8 point'. Following Girithi on its left bank, the route climbed up steeply and traversed across a bad scree patch. Finally it turned to enter the Siruanch valley. Suddenly we were amidst lovely pine, birch and rhododendron forests. From two deserted houses the route traversed a camp on a lovely alp. We had an occasional view of Uja Tirche and the Tirsuli wall. The route now crossed the nala to go up 660 m to Damphu Dhar (4200 m) and down to Gangdeopani. Traversing to the right we landed at Johar Kharak. Opposite was Girithi Dobala with Kio gad draining the Summa and Lapthal valleys, near the Tibet border. This was the edge of the Zaskar range. To the north of Girithi was the dry trans-Himalayan area. As we entered the Girithi gorge 600 m above the river-bed, Rambha Kot (5395 m) rose steeply opposite us. This intricate looking barren peak stands between Girithi and Kio gad. It is believed that the fairy Rambha pleases the gods here and towards dawn sometimes you even hear bells. It would be an ill-omen to disturb the gods at that time.

8. *Nanda Devi* by Eric Shipton, Part IV.

9. *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* by W.H. Murray and *The Ultimate Mountains* by Thomas Weir.



The route slowly solved itself with a descent of 700 m. There was no water anywhere and finally we were relieved to be camping at Dumpani (3500 m) 14 km.

The brightest idea that Scott gave to the expedition was, to my mind, the eastward traverse from Malari in the Dhauri to Milam on the Gori by way of the Girithi river. If only we could make it we should thus link the two great trade routes of Central Asia, and if only it were not too difficult the route might ultimately prove of value to travellers. From the broader view point, this passage would be of greater importance than the ascents of any mountain, and for that reason we had been puzzled by the lack of records.

—*The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*
by W.H. Murray, p. 187

On our return, in September 1988, we were fortunate to meet Douglas Scott (not to be mistaken for the younger Doug Scott) at Bombay, the originator of the idea. He vividly described the route with an unfailing memory at the age of 77. They had crossed eight ravines with many drops and climbs. Nothing had changed, in fact at some places it had become worse. First we ran into Are Gadera—a steep ravine full of snow. Afterwards we crossed Sangla Palyo which was a bowl of scree. Ahead came the beautiful Senyarupani alp. But it was getting late when we reached Dudhgarhi—the place of Dhanmaya. Some Tibetan god had crossed over and buried some treasure here which inflames the trees. Opposite we could see almost a 'river' of lime-stone totally frozen. We were tired and so we decided to stay here. If we are lucky, we thought, we may strike the Tibetan treasure too. In 1968 and 1984 a team from Delhi had crossed this gorge. With difficulty they could find a guide Gaur Sing. That too because he was going to Topidunga to look for his lost son Har Sing. Now this lost son came with us as a porter and told us that he had decided to stay at Milam with goats for two years causing anxiety to his family. Malari village boundary ends near Girithi. Some old houses stand as a testimony to their attempts at colonizing the area. All the grazing beyond this belongs to Milam. They come over the pass and spend summer months here. Across the Rambha Kot ridge was Girithi Dhura pass (5079) which led to Raoli on the Sumna-Lapthal route. A leisurely

walk of 4 km brought us to Girthi (3620 m) and soon we were set up to camp in a birch forest.

Attempt on Chalab

The Girthi west valley runs south for 4 km to the foot of Khoh. It bifurcates in a highly broken icefall in the SW to Chalab and climbs steeply in the SE to peak 6210 m. We set up camp (4300 m) at the bifurcation and turned SW. The icefall was a maze and after a day of recce we had to look for an alternative. A steep grassy patch led upwards. We had to climb this 'Bharal Bypass', like its namesake, on all fours. An exposed traverse tested nerves even on fixed rope. I dropped an ice-axe and Mushim dropped his rucksack, the unfortunate end of both reminding us of our fate in case of a slip.

The valley opened up a little and followed a moraine ridge. C2 was made at 4920 m. But the route ahead was disappointing. There was no way to reach the col to the north of Chalab (6160 m) which was the only route possible to the summit. Arun and I tried a circuitous route but it did not go. Mushim and Arun finally tried to go up 'Girthi Top' (c. 6120 m), north of Chalab. After a gruelling 10 hour climb we stopped at 5960 m. We had to call it off. We had enjoyed and climbed as much as was feasible for a small party.

Across Unta Dhura

Topidunga has a peculiar location and name. Situated in a bowl it resembles an inverted hat (Topi) of rocks. It derives the name from a giant rock in shape of a hat, a rare sight for people coming from Tibet. This is an important junction. The route to the south leads to Unta Dhura (5360 m) (onto Milam), to the southeast to Jainthi Dhura (5592 m) and to the east to Kungribingri la (5548 m) into Tibet. In the north lies Khingri Dhura (5244 m) leading to Lapthal. Thus it has a strategic and isolated position.

Girthi to Topidunga (4200 m) was a day's walk (12 km) via Gangharia where Girthi east joined. We were to follow the trail over Unta Dhura. Until the 1962 war with China, this pass bore heavy trade traffic. Caravans would come from Tibet across Kungribingri la, Jainthi Dhura and Unta Dhura in one day. Then they would go down to Dung (4000 m). 14 km, to Sangong and Milam.

Unta Dhura has had many visitors. Amongst the available records

are crossings by Lt. Hugh Rose¹⁰ in 1931, Longstaff and party in 1907, W.H. Murray in 1950 and A.D. Moddie and Gurdial Singh in 1959¹¹—to mention just a few. On 8 July in brilliant sunshine we were at the ruins of Madhosing Rawat's tea stall, below the pass. The strong winds and bleak surroundings were alleviated only by the grey lake of Gangpani. One can understand why Madhosing is revered even today. A cup of tea here between the two passes would certainly be worth a ballad. The view was also encompassing and one could see Himalaya as a barrier. As we left the pass, down to Pari Tal (lake of fairies) we could but admire the human effort required to cross this barrier. What motivation would lead caravans of loaded goods across this terrain? The route descended steeply to Dung (4000 m), 14 km, and via Samgong to Milam (3424 m), the meeting place of caravans.

The site of this historic village made us both happy and sad. Once about 500 houses nestled here. Now a few families live in ruined houses a few months of the year. Behind, the 'Dudhpani' stream ('stream of milk-white pure water') still flowed but it brought no prosperity. There were heavy rounded stones in a square which were lifted in sport by youngsters. Now with trade closed, the inhabitants have gone to the plains and only the ruins stand.

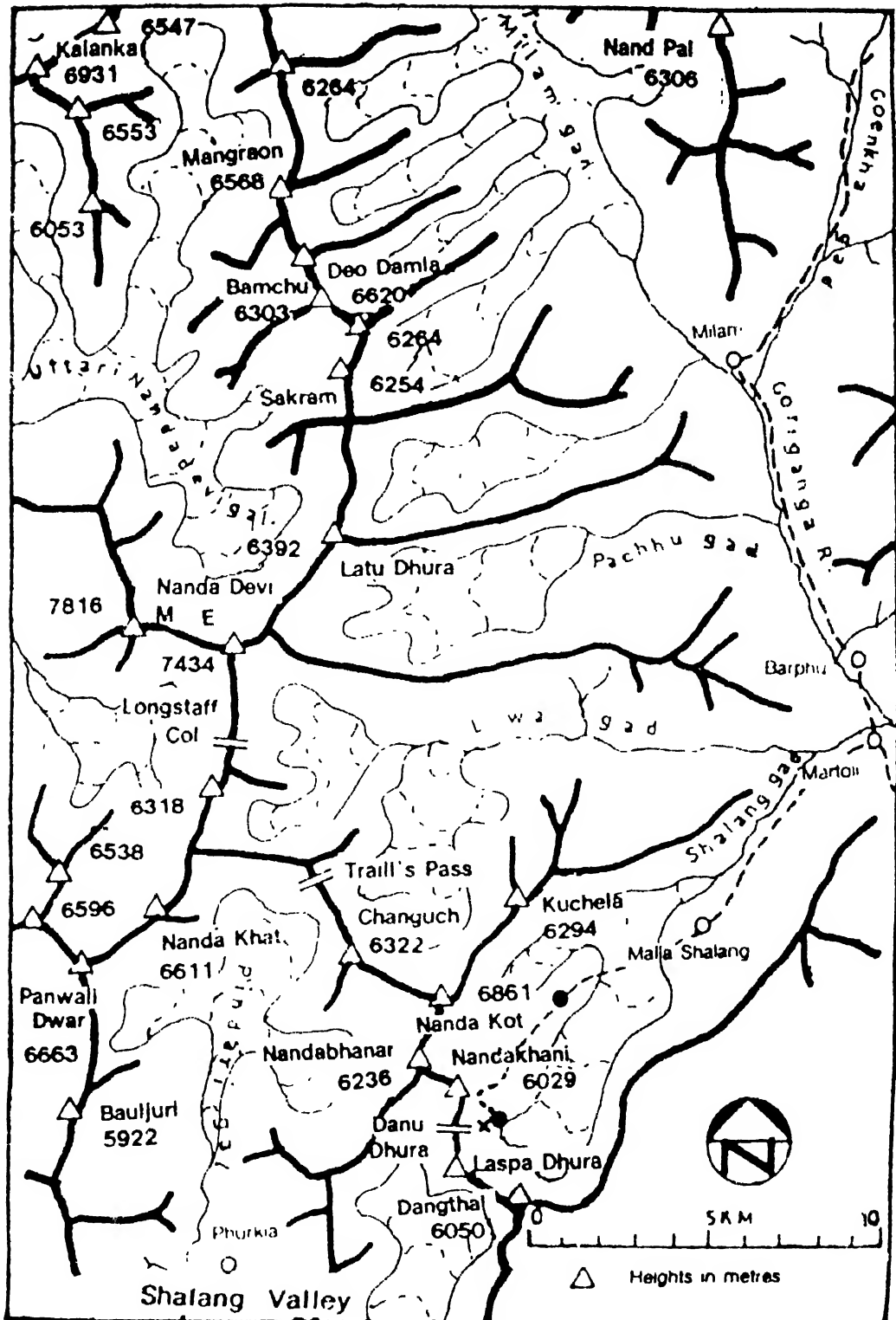
In these ruins lay the stories of the past. Gorkha Kyul is a strong building. It was built of heaviest stone by a Rani (queen) who used it as protection against the Gorkha invasion. She erected cairns on surrounding ridges which looked like humans. The Gorkhas were kept away, scared for a while, looking for the Rani as she roamed about in male dress. She washed her face one morning with both hands at Rankot (where the Gori ganga and Goenkha gad meet) a little outside Milam. As the tradition goes, a man washes with only one hand while ladies with both. She was thus identified and killed, leaving behind many songs of valour.

In 1950 the Scots had met the missionary L.C.J. Moules (a member of the Himalayan Club). He moved up with the *mawasa* (families) doctoring the caravans. He is still remembered. Though missionaries are present below in the plains, there are no Christians here at all. 'Christ cured with their medicines and now our Hindu gods also cure with ours'. So all reconverted themselves, as one villager put it!

9 July was a Saturday. By evening we saw a large group of

10. *H.J.*, Vol. IV, p. 135.

11. *H.J.* Vol. XXII, p. 151.



villagers marching towards Milam. They were all coming to watch the popular Hindu religious serial 'Ramayan' on the T.V. Next day the jawans from the border post also arrived to this solitary idiot box. Many had walked almost 30 kms to view this. About a decade ago almost 500 goats were sacrificed here at the temple on arrival, one by each family. All this was changed by the swami of Martoli. But still that evening people gathered to look at 'ghera', a circular rainbow around the sun. It brings bad weather.

Danu Dhura

Bad weather it did bring, but after 4 days. We trekked to Martoli on 10 July and camped at the beautiful Nanda Devi mandir. Martoli led to Lwa gad in the west. Dr. Longstaff and two guides passed here to reach the famous col on the Nanda Devi saddle, now named after him. The famous Traill's Pass had visitors from Martoli to Pindari valley. The pass was reached in 1830 by G.W. Traill, the first Deputy Commissioner of Kumaon, who in the words of A.L. Munro 'exercised a benevolent and active despotism from 1817 to 1835'. Among other famous parties here were: the Schlagintweits (1850), Ruttledge (1926), Japanese Nanda Kot team (1936), Osmaston and the surveyors (1938), Arnold Heim (1937) and S.S. Khara (1941).¹²

J.C. Donaldson wrote in June 1945 about the 'Possible alternative to Traill's Pass'.¹³ In August 1926 after their crossing H. Ruttledge and R.C. Wilson left four Martoli villagers including the famous guide Dewansing Lata. They went over a different route to Shalang gad (SW of Martoli), reaching Martoli in one day. We planned to go up Shalang gad and to locate this alternative to Traill's Pass.

Inquiries with villagers revealed that surprisingly they had heard of this alternate pass from Shalang but not from Lwa. All remembered that Dewansing took Ruttledge sahib across and was rewarded with land and guns. Some old persons had crossed this pass. But without exception, no one remembered the real Traill's Pass.

We went up the beautiful Shalang valley on 12 July. As we camped at Talla Shalang (4200 m) the monsoon caught up with us. It was raining in these parts after 4 years and with a vengeance. We halted here for 3 days with shepherds as company. Young Kalyansing peeped inside the kitchen on the first day and slept the whole day

12. *Abode of Snow* by K. Mason, pp. 69, 187, 268.

13. *H.J.*, Vol. XIII, p. 134.

there. Our anxious inquiries about the weather always had a reply from him: *Rook bhi sakta hai* (it may stop also). With this *also* added he always kept up our hopes and despair. So much for the local advice. For 4 days he gave us lectures on 'goat culture' and traditions of shepherding in the valley. On the 16th Chiring We (6559 m) opened to view in the east, and with mounting hopes we pushed up to Bhadeli Gwar (4600 m) at the foot of the climb. This was the sacred place of 'Lord Danu'. The god hailed from Danpur, across the pass in Pindar valley. People from Badhiakot (near the Ruphund-Pindari trail) come here to worship. It is not without significance that gods travel across valleys and high passes. There had to be a traditional pass here over which people of Danpur crossed and had installed their god.

Philistines may say that we were becoming superstitious like Kalyansing. But true enough, two separate recesses by Arun and me revealed an excellent safe route. Moreover there were some giant cairns all along, marking the route. This was 'Danu Dhura' (5560 m). The exact location of the pass was on the saddle between Nandakhani (6029 m) and Laspa Dhura (5913 m) on the western edge of Shalang gad. Above, it led to the snow-plateau below Nandabhanar (6236 m). At the SW end a depression led to Sal Changuj glacier and down to Kupi Dhura and Phurkia.

Early on the 17th, the three of us left, climbing 600 m on scree behind Bhadeli Gwar to a giant cairn. A safe traverse on snow led to the bottom of the final climb of 200 m to the pass. It was on scree and led to the flat ridge top. But for us that was the end of the road. By 2 p.m. we were caught in snowfall and had to camp where we were at 5200 m. Next day it deteriorated further and we had no option but to play safe. An unknown high pass on the other side could have trapped us.

However, we were satisfied about the existence of the pass from this side. Later we could check with photos and accounts of expeditions to Nandabhanar that the pass we saw would lead to the upper plateau.¹⁴ It would descend to the Sal Changuj glacier to Kupi Dhura and Phurkia on the Pindari trail. An inviting proposition—to test the strength of 'Danu Dhura'.

As we came down to the shepherd's camp, Kalyansing was singing with rain pouring outside. Something looked amiss with him looking red, in new clothes and a cap. He had taken a bath after

14 *It* .. Vol. 44, p 79.

4 months—on one of the wettest days! We went down to Martoli (16 km) and on the Tibet trade route to Bugdiar (19 km) and Lalam (20 km). Gori ganga was in full flood, but the track, the work of generations, was solid as ever. As roads were blocked ahead of Munsiary, we trekked along Gori ganga to Madkot. This was a fortress of the devils Mad and Ketab. They cheated the gods while making a bridge across the Gori ganga but were rehabilitated. Now only last year that bridge was completed and an alternate motorable road connects Munsiary. The 66 km road to Jauljibi on the Nepal border across the Kali river is unspoiled forest and a treat to walk through. It remains to be seen whether this new road and a proposed dam turns the valley into an abode of the devil once again.

As we ended our trek we felt satisfied. Having followed many historical trails, it was a journey into history. And history had not changed much here over the years. As Kalyansing was singing:

‘Only two things are missing up here: a ladder to climb up to the sky and a lid to cover the ocean’

3

Central Garhwal and Kumaon

A Brief Mountaineering Survey

1988

THE AREA OF Central Garhwal encompasses the Alaknanda-Saraswati valley near Badrinath and the Dhauli valley. To its south lies the Nanda Devi Sanctuary (Rishi valley) and to its west is the Gangotri valley.

Badrinath Area Exploration

There are numerous glaciers and peaks on both sides of the Alaknanda otherwise known as Saraswati, north of the Badrinath temple. This is *devbhoomi* the sacred valley of the gods for Hindus. Adi Shankaracharya (A.D. 800), the Hindu guru who led the revival of Hinduism, established four temples at the four corners of India. The northern temple is at Badrinath. (*Badri*—wild berries which grew here in plenty, *nath*—lord). He was said to have travelled across the Mana pass and the statue at the temple bears resemblance to Budha (Bodhisatva) and Vishnu symbols. Even today the head priest is from Kerala, the southern-most tip of India. This is the earliest record of travel in the region.

Religion was at the core of travel here. The Jesuit fathers have left a long record of crossing the Mana pass into Tibet. Father Antonio de Andrade and Brother Manuel Marques crossed this pass to Guge in Tsaparang province in Tibet in 1624. A little to the south of the Mana pass is the lake of Deo Tal from where the Saraswati rises. 'Father Andrade mentioned the little lake of Deo Tal, with the result that geographers mistook it for the great Manasarovar which they subsequently declared to be the source of the Ganges. From this mistake

there grew the tradition that the Ganges tunnelled under the Tibetan watershed. When this myth was exploded doubt was thrown on the whole of Father Andrade's story.¹

Kamet and Abi Gamin

Kamet (*Kangrie*—'lower snows' in Tibetan) attracted the first mountaineers. In 1848 Richard Strachy determined its height, followed by the Schlagintweits. In 1855 they went over the Mana pass and attempted it from the north reaching 22,259 ft on Abi Gamin. In 1874-77 the Survey of India under E.C. Ryall and I.S. Pocock set up a plane-table at 22,040 ft on the slopes of East Ibi Gamin. The Schlagintweits had named this range Western, Central and Eastern Ibi Gamin—these are now identified on modern maps as Mukut Parbat, Kamet and Abi Gamin respectively. From 1907 to 1920 various explorers attempted it (as tabulated at the end). A. Morris Slingsby attempted it from the west, reaching a steep pass ('Slingsby's Saddle') on E. Ibi Gamin. In 1912 C.F. Meade on his third trip in this area reached the high col between Abi Gamin and Kamet ('Meade's Col'). Finally in 1931 Frank Smythe led an energetic team of Shipton, Holdsworth, Greene, Birnie and 2 Sherpas who made the first ascent of Kamet ending a chapter of exploration. The second ascent was in 1954 by an Indian team led by Nandu Jayal, and by now it has been climbed fairly often. The only new route achieved is by its west ridge in 1986 by an Indo-French expedition (Col B.S. Sandhu).²

Abi Gamin was climbed in 1950 by R. Dittert, K. Berril, A. Tissieres and G. Chevally, who approached from the north over the Mana pass. Since then it has been regularly climbed from Meade's Col.

Climbers-Explorers

A few major expeditions did most of the explorations in these parts till the early fifties. The first to come was Frank Smythe in 1937. This was a most energetic trip, with one companion. He spent time in Bhyundar valley and gave it its famous title 'Valley of Flowers'. Nilgiri Parbat, 6474 m ('Blue mountain') was climbed quickly. Rataban, 6166 m ('Red arrow') was attempted. Crossing over Bhyundar

1. *H.J.*, Vol. IV, p.170 and Vol. X, p. 182.

2. *H.J.*, Vol. 43, p. 42.

khal to the Amrit ganga valley, he went up the Devban plateau, in search of a route to Mana Peak 6435 m ('Bidhan Parbat') and Devban, 6853 m were climbed. Going up the valley he climbed up from Gupt Khal 5760 m, over Pk c. 6600 m (21,500 ft) and made the first ascent of Mana. Smythe with his flair for writing well recorded the region for posterity.³

In 1939 Andre Roch made a number of ascents.⁴ The team came over from Gangotri after some high climbs. Roche entered Kosa glacier to climb Ghorī Parbat ('Horse Peak'). Next, was the first ascent of Rataban. They climbed many other peaks. Chaukhamba 7138 m was also a fine attempt by this team. Approaching it from its north face and east ridge, they lost two Sherpas in an avalanche. However in 1952 (French, Russenberger) the summit of this peak of 'Four pillars which support the world' was reached. In 1987 a 38 member strong team of the I.T.B.P. climbed Chaukhamba with two dogs. Five sum-miters skied down to base, covering 11 kms in 12 minutes, while the other summitter and the dogs took 3 days to descend. Such is the craze for novelty (Hannibal, of course, started it all with his elephants). In 1947, the Swiss (A. Roche) were back here again climbing Balbala, 6416 m, from Jagrao glacier. Dittert, Roche, Suttar, Graven and the leader Lohner reached the summit with Tensing Norgay and Ang Norbu.⁵ In the same year T.H. Braham crossed from Kalindi Khal to Bhyundar Khal, climbing peaks and recording the area.⁶

In 1950, four Scots under W.H. Murray crossed the Girthi gorge, a tributary of Dhauli. They trekked to Malari, Siruanch valley and to Unta Dhura for crossing into Kumaon. Apart from the peaks on the northern rim of Nanda Devi Sanctuary, they climbed Uja Tirche (6202 m) and attempted Lampak (6325 m). Their record of travel covered the area exhaustively.⁷ All along this period, the area received many small parties, who crossed passes, visited the various valleys and crossed over into Tibet and back. In August 1928 Major G.W.P. Money reported travels to Chor Hoti pass and the death of 6 Bhotias in 1927 in a freak storm. A similar incident was reported in 1987 when 12 jawans were killed near there. In both cases the bodies were strewn over a large area and it was wondered how wind could achieve

3. *Valley of Flowers and Kamet Conquered* by F.S. Smythe

4. *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 38.

5. *H.J.*, Vol. XV, p.37.

6. *H.J.*, Vol. XV, p. 90.

7. *H.J.*, Vol. XVI, p. 48.

this Gurdial Singh travelled here in 1951, 1954 and 1959 climbing Rataban, crossed to and from Manasarovar, climbing many smaller peaks on the way.⁸

Two 'Avalanche Peaks' lie north of Badrinath, equally famous evidently because they generated avalanches on the first climbers. T.H. Tilly and John Jackson were involved in an avalanche on the peak in the Bangneu glacier, 6196 m. Jackson received superfluous bruises while Tilly twisted his knee and had to be carried back to base. Two climbers David Bryson and Jackson returned to climb the peak on 18 June 1952. Young students climbed it in 1984 but without any mishap. The second, higher and the northerly, Avalanche Peak is 6443 m, south of Kalindi Khal. It was climbed by Eric Shipton and Frank Smythe on 22 July 1931 with two Sherpas. They were caught in two avalanches while returning. Smythe fractured a rib and both the celebrities were lucky to have escaped.⁹

With this, the phase of explorative climbing was over and it was left to determined climbing parties to take on the challenging peaks. A few major climbs in the area were that of: Mukut Parbat, 7242 m, (1951) New Zealand party,¹⁰ Hathi Parbat, 6727 m, (1963) I.T.B.P. team, Ganesh Parbat, 6532 m, (1965) Indian Police,¹¹ Repeat ascents of many peaks were also achieved.

Plenty of new climbs and exploration remain in the area, chief among these would be Purbi Dunagiri, 6489 m, Chalab 6160 m, Kholi, 6114 m, Tirstili West, 7035 m, Mana NW, 7092 m. and Lampak 6325 m.

Nilkanth

No history of Central Garhwal would be complete without a detailed mention of this majestic peak. It is a name of Shiva, presiding over Badrinath and worshipped by millions of pilgrims. It is a tough and challenging proposition for mountaineers.

In 1961 an Indian team led by Captain N. Kumar approached from the Satopanth glacier. After 10 days and five camps a 'first ascent' was claimed on 13 June. While the team members were being feasted, Jagdish Nanavati (Hon. Secretary of The Himalayan Club

8. *H.J.*, Vol. XIX, p. 1.

9. *H.J.*, Vol. XVIII, p. 106 and Vol. IV, p. 40.

10. *H.J.*, Vol. XVII, p. 42.

11. *H.J.*, Vol. XXVI, p. 113

since 1972) put a question mark to all the brouhaha. His was a classic stud, *Nilkanth—Still Unclimbed?* (A Study of the Indian Nilkanth expedition 1961), published in February 1962.¹² Based on his study of the terrain and the party's report he meticulously brought to light their failings. His was the pioneering study in this genre and the details are worth recalling. The Nilkanth 1961 expedition had no perspective of the peak and maintained that it was a 'gentle' trudge. From the fifth hump on the summit ridge they thought the summit to be a mere 200 ft away in height while it was actually 1470 ft. All the heights were inflated and as a result the summit party started with one flimsy tent for 7 persons and were trapped for almost 6 days by bad weather. Finally the team claimed an 'ascent' in foul weather without any proper record. But what happened later was still worse.

When challenged with substantial evidence of facts and figures, the bureaucracy moved to defend it by a one man committee of Surveyor Major N.B. Nayar. His findings were so pathetic that on exposure by Nanavati the powers that be were compelled to appoint a three-man committee headed by Col B.S. Jaswal. Every time the team changed its version, the heights of camps and timings were also changed. Finally the committee made up its own timings for them supported by fresh aerial photographs (which merely confirmed Nanavati's contention). On 25 December 1963 it declared the peak as 'climbed' in the newspapers. The report was naive to the point of disbelief. From Nanavati's exhaustive discussion with the summitter O.P. Sharma it was evident that he had no idea of the physical features of the mountain and none of the objections raised by Nanavati were ever answered by him or by the committee. Suspensions of a cover-up were more or less confirmed when the committee specifically suggested another expedition to Nilkanth in 1964 so that the terrain and timings could be verified. It was never implemented.

*The Alpine Journal*¹³ took note of it (T.S. Blakeney—AJ notes) clearly recording: 'The Committee have given an opinion in favour of the ascent having been made, but their support of claim is hedged round with certain qualifications that strike one awkwardly' (p. 145).

Unfortunately the *Himalayan Journal*¹⁴ passively accepted the

12. *Nilkanth—Still Unclimbed?* by Jagdish Nanavati. Privately published. Available in Alpine Club and Himalayan Club libraries.

13. *A.J.*, Vol. 68, No. 306, May 1963, p. 139 and Vol. 69, No. 308, May 1964, p. 145.

14. *H.J.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 150.

Jaswal committee report and recorded it. The then President of the Himalayan Club was also a member of the Sponsoring Committee of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Truth was sacrificed, perhaps at the altar of diplomacy.

However with his study Nanavati had removed the question mark from his title and it was *Nilkanth—Still Unclimbed*. Finally in 1974, an Indo-Tibet Border Police team climbed it by the same route. The details of their climb were never made public, presumably to avoid any comparison and embarrassment with the earlier fracas. Thus Nilkanth has as much enigmatic history as majestic beauty.

Kumaon

The British divided Kumaon creating Garhwal. This was of course resented by the Kumaonis. Now there is a demand for 'Uttarakhand' (northern land) joining both areas. People here are avid travellers and did a roaring trade with Tibet. Three major divisions of Kumaon had interaction with each other and Tibet.

Byans Valley

The easternmost part of Kumaon comprises the Kali river, running from Lipu Lekh to form the boundary between India and Nepal. Kuthi, Darma and Lassar merge into Kali at various points. Vyas rishi, a sage who wrote the *Mahabharat* is believed to have lived here, giving the area its name. There is a temple dedicated to him above Gunji. The pilgrim route to Manasarovar passed along the Kali and is again frequented by many today—the route having been reopened to pilgrim traffic.

Near Lipu Lekh on the route to Tibet, from a small temple of Kali, starts this 'black river'. At Gunji, the Kuthi river merges with Kali which forms the Indo-Nepal border. As the legend goes, it was the Britishers who interchanged the names of white Kali (meaning 'black') and blackish Kuthi rivers. This ensured a vast area of land as British territory as Kali was always accepted as the border. They built the above temple to authenticate the name—a good example of British practical diplomacy.

Another intrigue followed in the area in 1960. A contract was given to build a motorable road from Almora to Lipu Lekh pass to facilitate pilgrim traffic. The contractor was persuaded by the Chinese

to start the construction in reverse—from the pass to Almora. This would allow a good deal of strategic advantage to the Chinese to descend to the lower valleys. The folly of this was discovered and the road blown up. It has reached just beyond Tawaghat yet!

Kuthi emerges from Jolingkong lake 4630 m which is as beautiful as any. Passes of Mangsha Dhura and Lampiya Dhura are close at hand. Sangthang, 6480 m, is the only peak of note here and was climbed in 1968 (Indian, P. Dasgupta).

Shin la (5495 m) has a nasty reputation and it leads to the smaller upper Darma valley. It is the route to Nuwe and Lowe Dhura passes to Tibet. Further west Gangchal Dhura 5051 m leads to the upper Lassar valley. It was here, that the Scots arrived in 1950, through the Ralam pass (further west). But the Darma valley is most recorded by A. Heim and A. Gansser. Their travels here in 1937 opened the area to outsiders.¹⁵ They crossed into Tibet unauthorised and were ordered to return and 'escorted' back to Almora by the Commissioner. One of them reported back over the high Traill's Pass!

At Sosa village, the festival of Kandali to celebrate the killing of the remnants of Zorawar Singh's army is observed every 12 years. The ladies go out in procession to destroy the shrubs of Kandali (*Sporelanthus Wallachii*) growing every 12 years under which these soldiers were hidden. Zorawar Singh coming from Ladakh, had reached Taklakot, where he was killed in a battle in 1841. His demoralised army returned along the Kali, looting the villages on the way. The ladies resisted them and this is enacted till today.

Panch Chuli

'Five chulis' (cooking hearths) where the Pandavas cooked their last meal on the way to heaven. They are majestic and form a famous barrier between the Darma and Gori valleys. From this side they were attempted by parties over the Sona and Meola glaciers. They are numbered north to south (peak II at 6904 m is the highest) and are difficult. H. Rutledge reached it in 1929. Graaff and Snelson (1950), the Scots (1950) made an attempt from this side. H. Harrer (1952) tried from the west. Finally it was left to two massive expeditions by the Indo-Tibet Border Police to open the route (1972) from the west (Gori valley) and make the first ascent in 1973. On the same divide a number of fine peaks merit attention, like Ngaling, 6041 m.

15. *The Throne of Gods* by A. Heim and A. Gansser.

Gori Valley

Kalabaland glacier is the first valley from the east in this section. Chiring We, 6559 m, ('Mountain of Long Life') was the finest peak to be climbed in 1979 across a huge icefall.¹⁶ Peaks in the upper cirque were also climbed. On the eastern rim Suli Top, 6300 m, was climbed in 1986 after two failures.¹⁷ Further south Suitilla, 6373 m ('Needle Sharp') is the 'Changabang of Kumaon'. Two fine peaks, Chaudhara, 6510 m ('Four ridges') was climbed in 1973¹⁸ and Rajrambha, 6537 m ('The King's Fairy') was climbed in 1971. All later attempts on it have failed.

The main Gori valley from Munsiairy to Milam is known as Johar. All residents of the upper villages were traders with Tibet. Hence in the summer months they travelled and during the off-season reaped a harvest of 'jowar' (maize). This harvesting gave them and the area the name of 'jowari bhotia' (now Johar). A solid stone track leads over the Unta Dhura pass to Tibet. With the closing of trade, the area has lost all its importance and wealth.

At the head of the valley stands Hardeol (7151 m) and Tirsuli (7074 m) which has attracted many climbers. The Poles tried Tirsuli in 1939 in vain. Two of them died at C3. In 1964 Capt Kohli's team suffered damage in an avalanche. It was the determined efforts by a Bengal team led by C.K. Mitra in 1966, that finally led to its ascent.¹⁹ Hardeol ('God's Temple') beat back attempts from the north in 1975 by the ITBP. Four ladies of the Indo-New Zealand team were killed in the icefall to its south. Finally the I.T.B.P. Sherpas climbed over the Tirsuli ridge at c. 6400 m, over the peak 6508 m to the summit at 7151 m and returned. It was a magnificent achievement completing the Hardeol-Tirsuli saga.²⁰

On the eastern rim, peaks like Nanda Pal 6306 m, Nital Thaur, 6236 m, Nanda Gond, 6315 m and Kalganga Dhura, 6215 m stand. Each is difficult and beautiful and only Nanda Pal has been climbed (in 1973). On the west stand the peaks of Nanda Devi Sanctuary and the goddess herself. From here Longstaff reached the col (5910 m) on the Sanctuary walls, while a few parties have crossed the 'Traill's Pass.'

16. *H.J.*, Vol. 30, p. 73.

17. *H.J.*, Vol. 43, p. 33.

18. *H.J.* Vol. XXXIII, p. 115.

19. *H.J.*, Vol. XXVII, p. 67.

20. See I.T.B.P. Bulletin.

Nanda Kot

This 'Fort of Nanda' (6861 m) is an imposing peak dividing the Gori and Pindari valleys. It was reached by Dr. Longstaff in 1905 and in 1936 the Japanese made the first ascent.²¹ An Indian team in 1959 climbed it again. In 1986 the Indo-Japanese team made another ascent to celebrate fifty years of its first ascent.

The peak has its share of intrigue too. It is known that Indo-American teams climbed it twice to install and remove a nuclear detection device on its summit in the late 1960s. This was to monitor Chinese activity in Tibet (after the failure to place it on Nanda Devi). Obviously no published records of this are available, except in some newspapers when the story leaked in 1978.

Danpur

The westernmost part of Kumaon receives the name from the generosity of its people who give free food to travellers (*Dan*—gift, *pur*—place). Danpurians are the best porters and the most faithful. The area consists of two major valleys: Pindari and Sunderdhunga valleys.

Pindari glacier has Traill's Pass at its head and the peaks of Nanda Khat, 6611 m, to its north and Nanda Kot to its south. It has witnessed deaths (Japanese, Indians) in the icefall and the final climb of Nanda Khat ('bed of Nanda') was in 1972. To the south of Pindari is the Kafni glacier and at its head nestle smaller peaks like Nanda-bhannar (6236 m) and Nandakhani (6029 m).

Panwali Dwar, 6663 m, ('Gateway of Winds') is a beautiful peak, connected with the Sanctuary walls and dividing Pindari and Sunderdhunga. Like many other peaks, the Japanese repeatedly assaulted it until they finally climbed it in 1980 to complete all the major peaks in the area.

Sunderdhunga ('Beautiful Stones') is a lovely valley into which Shipton and Tilman descended from Sunderdhunga Khal, 5520 m, in 1934. This was the exit route which they strongly warned against *using and has not been repeated*.

Wilfrid Noyce was here in 1944 to climb Tharkot, 6099 m (previously called Simsaga) a small beautiful peak.²² Maiktoli, (6803 m) climbed by Eric Shipton in 1934 has a formidable south face, an

21. *H.J.*, ! X, p. 71 and Vol. XI, p. 174

22. *H.J.*, Vol. XIV, p. 132.

imposing 1800 m wall, which was climbed by the Japanese from here in 1977.

Bidalgwar glacier adjoining this saw the Yugoslavs in 1960 ascend Trisul II (6690 m) and III (c. 6100 m), climbing most of the route at night to avoid avalanches.²³ Finally the imposing west wall of Trisul I (7120 m) was climbed in 1987 exactly 80 years after its first ascent by Longstaff and his team from the Trisul glacier in the north. The Yugoslavs traversed from Trisul I-II-III and para-jumped to the valley to bring Kumaon into modernity. Ales Kunaver was a member of the first Yugoslav team which had climbed in 1960. In 1987 Ms. Vlasta Kunaver climbed Trisul I and was one of the para jumpers. Like father like daughter!

This completes the brief sketch of the major climbs in the land of the gods. Perhaps just as it began with the Christian fathers, the southernmost part of Kumaon ends with E. Stanley Jones and his 'Christian Ashram' at Sat Tal. This is a Methodist Church, the style and name was that of a Hindu organisation. Earl Denman who attempted Everest alone and secretly with Tensing Norgay in 1947 stayed here for many years. He died here in the late 70s. This perhaps signifies the attraction of Kumaon and Garhwal for mountaineers.

23. *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 73.

Note: Five Months in the Himalaya by A.L. Mumm, *This My Voyage* by T.G. Longstaff, *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* by W.H. Murray and *Himalayan Club Newsletters* also cover this area exhaustively.

Garhwal Climbs

Now the field of battle is a land of standing corpses; those determined to die will live; those who hope to escape with their lives will die.

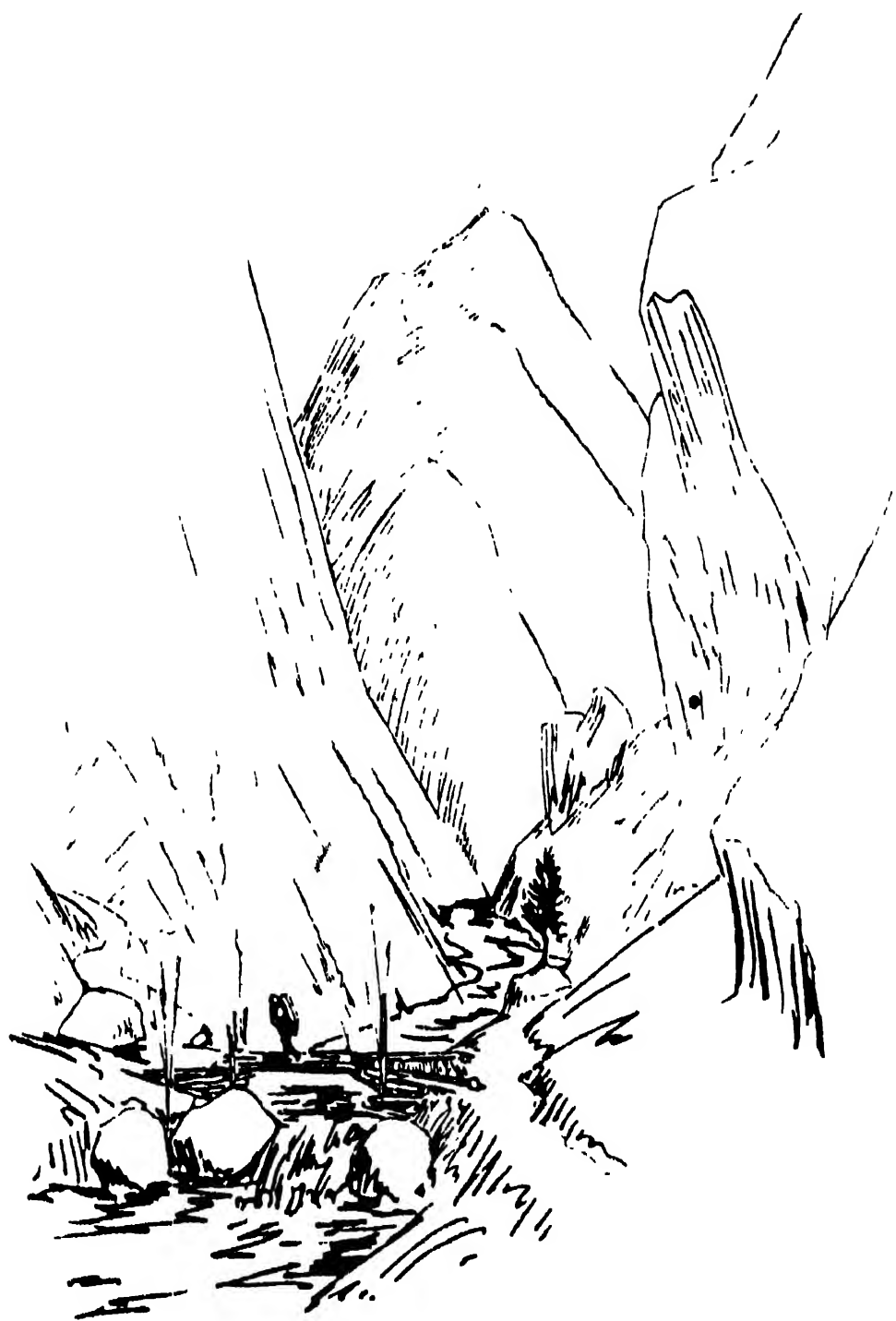
—Wu Ch'i

Deaths and accidents on mountains are tragic. Bethartoli Himal claimed four lives. The wider aspects it covered for a young sport in India were much deeper. Arun Samant had two traumatic experiences on this expedition. It is only after determination that he could return to climbing again almost after a decade.

A fortune-teller had once predicted that I would be well-known at the age of 29 years. But he did not forecast that the fame would be achieved by falling into a crevasse and almost being killed on Devtoli! But what these tragedies taught me, and the spirit with which I had to face them, has been an abiding education.

Sudarshan Parbat was the first international expedition I organised. It was a pleasant experience, like a good French wine. Zerksis Boga excelled on the climb, as he did while getting down the crevasse to pull me up.

One of the leading mountaineers, who knew the Ruinsara area well, remarked that it would be well-nigh impossible to cross the crevasses of the Bandarpunch glacier to climb Bandarpunch West peak. We did just that to achieve a first ascent. But he was right; I almost died falling into a crevasse while returning. The peak has not had a second ascent yet and a few climbers have lost their lives on its slopes.



4

Tragedy of Bethartoli Himal

1970

THE TRAGEDY came slowly, almost absurdly. Looking back now in 1992, after 22 years, the Bethartoli Himal and Trisul expeditions of 1970 seem so far away. But the memories of the tragedy and its aftermath are still fresh. Death on a mountain is always a serious business and my only experience of losing friends in the Himalaya is still painful.

Ang Kami almost did not join the expedition. He had climbed Everest in 1965 and was considered a 'national hero'. He was the youngest person to have climbed Everest. What would he do on a 6352 m mountain, we thought, and did not invite him. He came to Bombay in December 1969 to conduct his 10th rock climbing course in Bombay. After all the students were back to the camp, the two of us finished the last rappel and sat down.

'Why have you not invited me to Bethartoli', Ang Kami asked with some pain.

'You are already a famous man used to bigger expeditions and their habits. . . .'

'I know all that'. He cut me short, like the good friend that he was. 'If Nanavati, Rekhadidi and you are going, I will come to Bethartoli, *whether you invite me or not*'. He joined with the best selected Sherpas and equipment. He worked so hard for the expedition that we were put to shame for not asking him in the first place. But Ang Kami did not return from Bethartoli.

We were a six member team which attempted the two peaks of Bethartoli Himal (6352 m) and South (6318 m). A four-member ladies team climbed Trisul (7120 m) ensuring a height record for the Indian ladies and its leader Dr. Meena Agrawal. The Scottish Himalayan

Expedition in 1950 had briefly attempted the North peak of Bethartoli Himal (5831 m), while the Germans had climbed the South peak in 1956. In 22 years since our trip, Bethartoli Himal has been climbed only once, by the Italians (Renato Moro) via the northeast ridge in 1977, and the South peak has been climbed a few times. Except for these climbs, the group has been left alone. Such is the strength of Bethartoli.

We were a happy team led by Prof Ramesh Desai and fortified by the presence of the meticulous Jagdish Nanavati. Zerksis Boga and myself had good climbing experience. Arun Samant and Nitin Patel, both student engineers, were well-trained, eager mountaineers. Dr. Prabhakar Naik provided the medical cover.

The ladies team and our's travelled together to the mountains. In those early days very few mountaineers were seen in these areas, and ladies almost never. As we stopped at an army transit camp, almost 500 jawans stood silently watching the ladies. A six-foot tall military policeman, in charge of the situation, softly spoke in Hindi; '*Jawanbhailok yahan nahin khade rahenge*' (Jawans will not stand here). In minutes they all disappeared in unbelievable silence. It reminded us of the famous scene in 'Dr. Zhivago' (David Lean's famous movie) where Alec Guinness did a similar trick as he dispersed the Russian mob by the snap of a finger.

Before beginning our trek we spent our last civilized evening at an Army mess at Joshimath. All the re-packing was done and we relaxed as the army officers looked after the ladies. We boys sat in one corner. When we politely refused the second round of rum there came a loud order from a moustachioed Colonel from the other end: 'Nobody drinks one peg in my mess, drink the bottle'. 'Yes sir'. We had to be carried back on the shoulders of jawans with two lanterns throwing light in the front. All I remember of the walk back is Boga murmuring, 'I am the Governor'. He was referring to the habit of a Bombay Governor who took evening walks at hill stations with aides holding lanterns in front of him.

But there were no lanterns ahead of us from here on. We crossed the Dharanshi and Malathuni passes on the famous Nanda Devi trail. Bethartoli Himal peaks are situated on the outer walls of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. To its south rises Trisul which was climbed early this century. The eastern approaches to Bethartoli peaks rise from the Trisul nala. To reach this, the expedition had to follow the famous but difficult trail. Turning south at Deodi en route, the base camp at

Tridang was reached in about five days, on 28 May 1970. Both the teams started working on their respective mountains. By this time we had formed a good team, and all the members were ready to climb as a cohesive group. With Ang Kami there were Pasang Temba, a very senior Sherpa, Chewang Tashi a young climber and four Sherpa H.A.Ps.

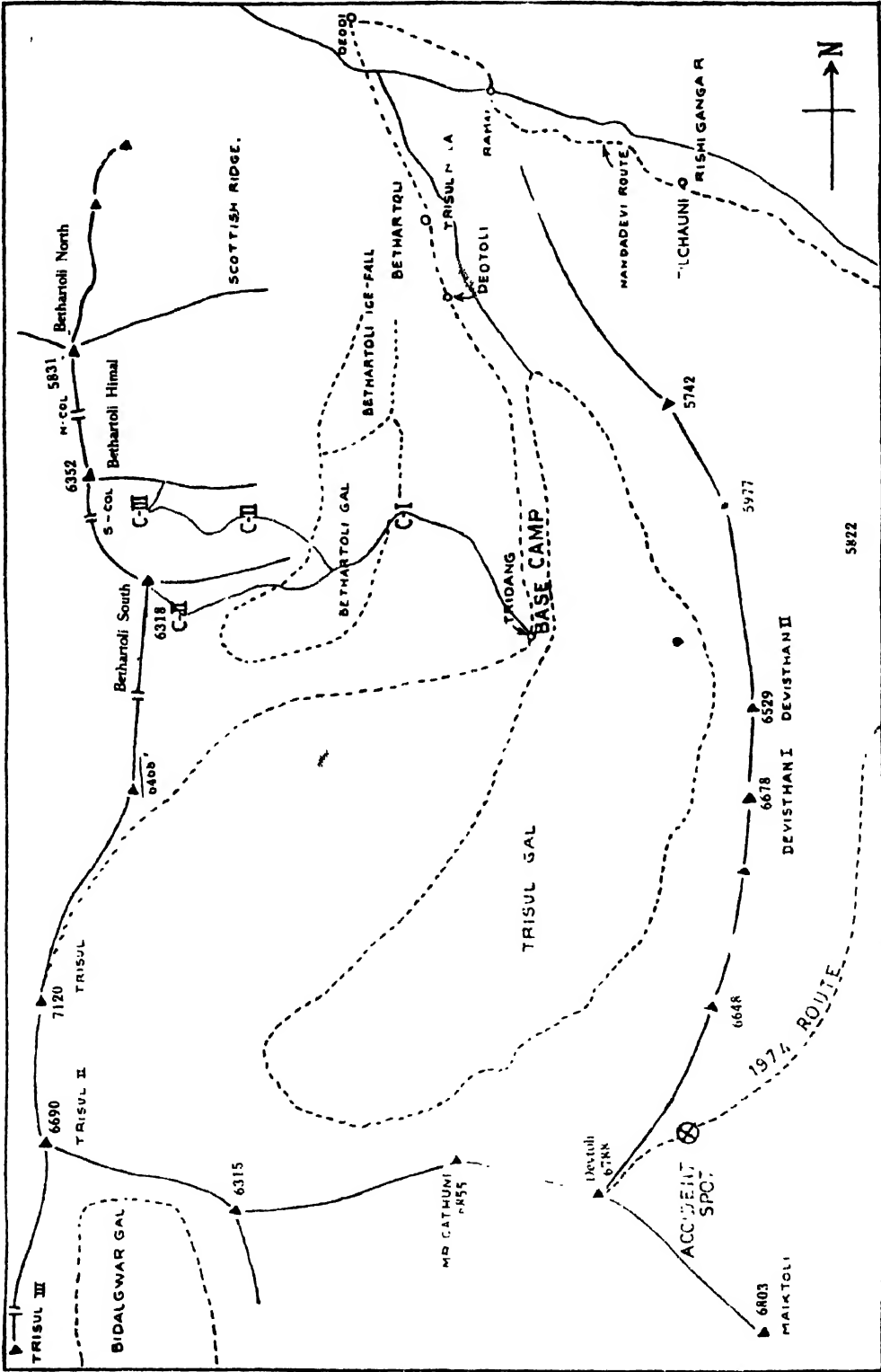
On 30 May Camp 1 (5600 m) was put up on a small ridge facing both the Bethartoli peaks. With so much support, the camp was stocked up very quickly. Ang Kami suggested we take advantage of the prevailing good weather to tackle Bethartoli South directly from this camp. This would give a clear idea of approaches on the main peak as well.

On the 31st, Arun, Ang Kami and Phurba Tharkey left Camp 1. Traversing snow slopes for an hour they reached the vicinity of the south face of the east ridge. They climbed an intermediate rock spur. A steep climb over a patch of hard snow led them to the middle of the east ridge. It led further to the summit pyramid but was heavily corniced. Soon the mountain lured a false move. Arun, trying to take a photo of the main peak, stepped on a cornice which broke, throwing him 20 m down. Phurba held him on the belay, and with Ang Kami, pulled him up. Arun had lost an ice axe and a camera and was badly shaken. It was 2 p.m. and hence they retreated to Camp 1.

On the same day, a recce of the main peak from its eastern cwm was carried out. From Camp 1 it involved a descent to a cwm between the Bethartoli peaks. The cwm was crevassed in the middle. The experienced Pasang Temba located a route through the crevasses. He selected sites for further camps as well. Boga and Nitin now joined the party at Camp 1 and we were in full strength.

The next ill-omen was on the radio. Ian Clough was killed on the Annapurna South Face expedition. Ian had stayed at Bombay for some time before leaving for the mountains. We had a few training sessions with him and had even planned a joint expedition the next year. Boga, particularly, had become a good friend. He was severely shaken, to the extent of opting out of further climbing. Perhaps his intuition saved his life.

By the evening of 1 June we had further bad news. Dr. Rekha Parikh, who was not acclimatising well, had suffered an attack of acute bronchitis at the base camp. Doctors had suggested to wait, but the experienced Ang Kami advised evacuation to the lower camp immediately. Even one extra night could prove fatal. So he left for the



BETHARTOLI HIMAL-TRISUL REGION

base camp. Next day Rekha was carried 600 m down. This possibly saved her life. Leaving the base camp on 2 June, Ang Kami climbed up all the way to Camp 1 again by the afternoon, to continue climbing. That evening we sat down to plan the future moves as the weather was still excellent.

With my cough, I was selected to go for the easier South peak with Prof Desai, Chewang Tashi and Phurba. Arun and Nitin were to join the experienced Pasang Temba and Ang Kami to attempt the main peak. They were supported by 3 H.A.Ps. Both the teams were to move to their respective higher camps and to attempt the peaks on different days. The die was cast.

We all sat together in the evening sun. Though I knew Nitin only a little, he suddenly opened up, talking about his family and life. He hailed from a small town in Gujarat and had retained the simplicity of the place. As night encroached on our talks we wished each other luck. In the tent I slept between Pasang Temba and Ang Kami, listening gazals on the radio. Ang Kami made fun of them and sang his Sherpa songs. His last couplet was:

*Sheetal mathe ni, Sheetal bhayo ri,
Lau lau lau, bhatku chha maya lai.*

(It is cold above me and cold all around. In such inhospitable surroundings I am roaming with my maya (desires)).

* The next morning after an hour our routes parted. I shook hands with Ang Kami and Nitin. I never saw them again.

Bethartoli South

3 June. Our party established Camp 2 (5950 m) for the South peak on the névé that feeds the main glacier. After an uncomfortable night we left by 7.30 a.m. for the summit. The chief difficulty was a 10 m high ice wall, almost vertical. It was guarded by a bergschrund. I fell into a crevasse but was held by Chewang Tashi. After a little struggle and by fixing some rope, the summit was gained at 11.15 a.m. We enjoyed the view and looked around. On the final slopes of Trisul (7120 m) we could see three dots nearing the summit. But there was no trace of anyone on the Bethartoli Main peak. Clouds gathered and we descended quickly. By 3 p.m. we reached Camp 1. Usually the afternoon storm cleared by the evening. But not this time. The snow-

fall started gently, it was followed by a strong wind and finally turned into a blizzard. It lasted without a break for 70 hours. It was impossible to stay calmly in those old-fashioned high tents which we had at Camp 1. No stove could be lit and, slowly, the blizzard was sapping our strength.

More bad news followed on the radio. A team from Bombay had lost 2 climbers in Kumaon, quite near us. We knew them and the shock waves it created in us were unnerving. On 5 June the blizzard did not abate. We were filled with doubts and anxiety. What would be the fate of the other team on the main peak? Would Bethartoli strike?

The main peak party had entered the eastern cwm between the two Bethartoli peaks on the 4th. They established Camp 3 (5850 m) about 180 m below the col between the two peaks. This route was recce'd by the experienced Pasang Temba earlier. It passed near a crevassed zone between the two peaks. Caught in the blizzard they made a cursory attempt on the peak the next day. With the ferocity of the winds increasing, they debated over whether to withdraw now, in 1 m of fresh snow, or to wait. But then there could be more snow and they would be trapped in the broken cwm. The wind had blown-off all the marker flags and obliterated their tracks. Pasang Temba advised waiting, while Ang Kami was opting for getting out immediately, before the food and fuel ran short. Finally youth won over experience. They decided to retreat the next morning. They tempted fate.

Avalanche

They could hardly go down 100 m in deep snow in two hours. Ang Kami was the soul of the party, unroping himself to help anyone in trouble. But a little after 10 a.m. a violent sound was heard. A huge avalanche came from the southern slopes of the east ridge of Bethartoli Himal. The party of 7 was tied to a 60 m rope to remain together. They were hurled down 70 m before anyone could do a thing.

The snow settled. The party was thrown over a deep crevassed zone. To avoid this zone they had specifically turned nearer the slope, which avalanched. The devil had struck to throw them in the 'deep sea', so to say.

Arun and Pemba Tsering were the only persons on the surface. Arun freed himself and dropped his rope to Pasang Temba who was hanging by a small piece of rope against the ice wall of a crevasse. Slowly he came up by the rope dropped by Arun. There was no trace of Ang Kami, Gnappa Sherpa and Chewang Phinzo. Nitin's body was



Bethartoli Himal (right) and South peak.

found, the upper part half buried in snow. He must have died instantly. The death had struck selectively. Almost each alternate person on the rope was killed with Ang Kami in between.

There was no time to waste. Pasang Temba led Arun and Pemba Tsering through soft snow. They were badly shaken and had only one ice axe between them. At 2.30 p.m. a loud whistle was heard at Camp 1. They were escorted to the camp. Chewang Tashi started weeping without restraint. After inquiring with Pasang Temba it was decided that in the present snow conditions, and with the blizzard still blowing, it was not possible to send a rescue team immediately. The survivors were taken down to the base camp. A team reached the accident spot later in clearer weather. But they could only find the body of Nitin Patel, which was photographed and given a snow-burial.

A haggard and emotionally shattered party reached civilization. Pasang Temba was always drunk and crying. We members had to remain sane. But back at Lata village on the last night on the trail, almost everyone broke down. The tragedy was too stunning. As the fire turned to embers each fell off to sleep utterly exhausted. But the tragedy was to take different shapes from now onwards.

Back to civilization, the expedition was faced with explaining the tragedy. It was not easy to explain the wrath of the unkind mountain Gods and inclement weather to those who did not understand the sport. The gloomy mood that we were in made things harder. As our leader reflected in an article later on.

Where had we gone wrong in planning the expedition? The objective had never been beyond our physical powers or technical skill. We had taken every precaution for safety.

In the face of prevailing conditions an expedition, large or small, ever-so-well equipped could have fought better for survival. Had we paid the penalty of underestimating weather conditions? If so, the punishment had been severe. My thoughts went to Bombay, Darjeeling and the base-camp. Would those at home understand the spirit of our expedition? Would they understand that the Himalayas are still capable of making nonsense of man's efforts to conquer some of its peaks?

But back at Bombay we realised that some armchair commentators did not understand the intricacies of the actual decision making process and movements on the mountains. Some of them started a vicious campaign against the expedition leadership. Unfortunately, instead of sympathetically understanding the trauma the team had

undergone, the Managing Committee of our sponsors, 'The Climbers Club', Bombay, almost after a year, decided to pass certain strictures. Within the Managing Committee there were endless debates as Jagdish Nanavati and myself tried to explain the fallacies of their contentions and protested against their refusal to adopt a fair procedure.

In conformity with their prejudiced minds, the leader was not asked to explain anything and a majority decision was taken to condemn the leadership without even inviting the leader for a discussion prior to such a condemnation. Only on a strong insistence by Jagdish was a communication sent to the leader for his views on the adverse comments already passed. The leader's reply was deliberately suppressed from simultaneous publication in *The Climbers Club Bulletin*¹ along with the 'Comments'. Indeed, no consideration was given to the reply as it was not even mentioned anywhere. Evidently there was a closed mind functioning here. Even the note of dissent by the Club President was deliberately withheld from publication along with the 'Comments', as normally required under cannons of any fair inquiry. It betrayed a totally biased attitude, far from the declared purpose of listing 'certain principles for the benefit of future expeditions'. The presence of inherent hazards on the mountains was not appreciated nor the compelling circumstances under which decisions and actions had been taken. It is erroneous to cast any blame by hindsight. In protest Jagdish, Ashvin Mehta (Hon. editor) and I resigned from the Managing Committee. The 'Comments' were fittingly replied to and published in the next issue of the Club Bulletin,¹ though belatedly. The entire climbing community within the Club supported our stand and condemned the Managing Committee by writing in the Bulletin.² The unfair and petty-minded methods adopted by the Managing Committee stood exposed. The episode achieved nothing. The discord caused disaffection within the active membership and sowed the seeds which made the Club gradually defunct and ultimately extinct.

As predicted by Soli Mehta,³ no wonder there were no takers for the Climbers Club's sponsorship by any expedition subsequent to what befell the Bethartoli Himal Expedition!

For us, the younger and more active climbers, life and mountain-

1. *The Climbers Club Bulletin*, Bombay, No. 8, September 1971, p. 29.

2. *C.C. Bulletin* No. 9, October 1973, pp. 1-20, 26-42 and 65-102.

3. *C.C. Bulletin* No. 9, pp. 84-85.

eering had moved on. But it was hard for Jagdish Nanavati, who had formed and nurtured the Club and was its current President.

Mountaineering as a sport was still in the growing stages in India in the 70s. The concept of 'calculated risk taking' and the fact that mountaineering involves a certain amount of risk even to life, was not accepted by those whose views were formed 'by the book' and not through experience. There is nothing much one can do against *vis major* when a mountain strikes. This is the fundamental basis of the sport and its attraction.

Some members of Nitin's family had met us at Joshimath during our return. They were shocked. Facing them, explaining to these simple folk the destructive power of the mountain was an impossible task. When they returned home and informed Nitin's mother of the tragedy, she refused to believe that her son was dead. Arun visited Rajkot to console the family. However, Nitin's mother, like a truly pious Hindu lady, believed that one day Nitin would emerge from the Himalayan mountains and come home. For almost 15 years that we inquired, the same state of shock and hope persisted with her. One day a headline in the local newspaper stated 'Dead Nitin returns alive'. It was a story of a sadhu, who had come from the Himalaya and consoled the grieving mother. She saw her lost son in him. Little do we mountaineers realise the extent of tragedy caused by a death.

Most of us lived in joint families. The sport of mountaineering was pursued as a hobby and not as total commitment. Everyone found it difficult to explain the tragedy to their near and dear ones. Jagdish, though not involved in the accident at all, found himself in turmoil with the affairs of the expedition later on. With his family pressures he did not visit the Himalayan range, even for a trek, for twelve years. Arun as a young student was interested in participating in serious climbing. But after an expedition of such a tragic nature he could not return to active climbing due to the wishes of the family. Such was the impact on the society that all of us had to explain the events but were not understood easily. It is the lure and attraction of the mountains that allowed Jagdish and Arun, in particular, to return to active trekking and climbing later. They had continued an active academic interest in mountaineering and perhaps that kept the flame alive in them.

Ang Kami's death had sent shock waves in the media, in climbing circles and, particularly, in the Sherpa community. He had a charisma that had won many friends. His mother was 70 years old and she was unconsolable at the loss of her only unmarried son. Rekha and I had

gone to Darjeeling to take part in the final death rituals of Ang Kami, Gnappa Sherpa and Chewang Phinzo.

Even with the traditional free flow of *chang* the gloomy atmosphere did not subside. The Sherpas had lost their prince. After the ceremonies, Ang Kami's mother left for Kalimpong. In the later years she did not come much to Darjeeling. It reminded her of her lost son. Though we did not speak the same language her intense pain always came across. We took care to assist her till she died at the age of 86 years.

Pasang Temba, the brave survivor was a broken man. He had brought up Ang Kami almost as a family member and after his death he hit the bottle. He lost his son later in another mountaineering accident. He passed away soon thereafter.

Thus the tragedy of Bethartoli extended much beyond the avalanche. Its human proportions were as high as a mountain, particularly in Indian society where death in a sport is not accepted easily. If the Hindu and the Buddhist belief of the rebirth is true, these brave mountaineers must be climbing somewhere today. Perhaps it is true, the Sherpa belief, that the mountain gods gather to themselves those they love.

5

Sudarshan Parbat—Une Belle Montagne

1981

WE WERE a group of eleven, four French and seven Indian climbers. After a long and tiring rail journey the bus was a luxury. We halted at Tehri to finish the last of the delicious mangoes. We saw Col Sandhu going in the opposite direction in a jeep. Huber and I shouted out to him but to no avail. Dejected we stood. Quickly we both turned to the bus to devour another basket of mangoes we were carrying for Col Sandhu, and laughed at our instant mutual intuition. Well mountaineers think alike all over the world! We knew that the Swetvarn Indo-French Expedition would get on well!

Why this nationality mix? It all started two years ago. Jean Odier visited Bombay for training and decided to trek with us around Bombay in the rains. We all wondered at this Frenchman who preferred to roam around in the mud instead of the exotic streets of Paris. But an idea was born. Though two of his brothers and friends could join us, it was ironic that he could not.

Hectic letter exchanges and paper work began. This was to last till the end. The French just could not understand this at first till of course they had a brush or two with the Indian bureaucracy. I remember the cartoon. It showed a mountaineer with an ice-axe hanging on

the wall, pounding on the typewriter on one side. The other side showed him sitting on a toilet seat with tissue paper hanging below. The captain said 'No expedition is started or. . . finished without the paper work being done!'

But the paper work had its advantages. First we had to find a mountain to climb and learn all about that mountain. After many con-

siderations, Sudarshan Parbat became 'our' mountain. It was beautiful and challenging. Situated above the Gangotri temple it was seen by millions of pilgrims and mountaineers through the ages. But the chief reason was J.C. Nanavati. In 1972 a Calcutta based group claimed a mistaken first ascent of this peak. They had climbed only Koteshwar—600 m lower. With his usual meticulous study, Nanavati exposed the mistake. He put at our disposal all the material, diagrams, photographs of this classic exercise. That settled it.

The curtain-raiser was the arrival of the French. At the airport I was ready with those hard earned certificates which the Indian customs would have loved to stamp all over. But Bernard, Hubert and Jacques with *oui, non, monsieur*, a mixture of expertise and innocence and shrugging of the shoulders were out without any help from me at all ! I was impressed. All the planning had been done at Bombay. Majority of the food and equipment was ready and packed. We added the French gear and the high-altitude food and were ready to depart.

We had three major difficulties. The last was of course climbing the Sudarshan Parbat. But the first could have made us a non-starter. At the railway station on 1 May to our surprise we were informed that our tickets were not valid and we had no seats on this packed train. Kanu excels in such situations. A wave of the hands, little hush-hush talks and soon we were comfortably settled. It was time after all for the Indian trick!

The history of Sudarshan is brief though spread over 19 years. It was attempted by 5 expeditions. Mostly by the west ridge and once by the south ridge. The last attempt was in 1979 by the Himalayan Association, Calcutta. They reached high on the west ridge. After the study of the pictures and other materials we decided to opt for the unseen and unknown east ridge exactly on the opposite side. It is steeper and more icy. But it offered a higher camp site. And if the mountain remained quiet, as it did, it would be a hard but safe climb. But for attaining the base of the east ridge; we had to circumvent the mountain; coming from the northwest and going over some very bad moraine to the east. Much against the local advice we decided to try that.

The rail journey was simply terrible. Someone called it a 'lucky-train' to Dehradun. Sitting above in a packed compartment, Rodhan tried to find some 'aesthetic' beauty in the dress and songs of the pilgrim crowd. But in the ultimate analysis it was 48 hours of sheer

torture ! We changed to a comfortable bus, past the 'mango junction' to Uttarkashi. The bus dropped us at Darbani on the 4th. The mad rush began. We had to trek 8 km to Gangnani, travel by a local bus to Lanka and trek 11 km to the Gangotri temple. This with 2000 kg of luggage was certainly a challenge. Luggage was sent on the mules directly from Dabrani while we rushed to find seats in a bus full of pilgrims at Gangnani. A ride of nightmares began. Seated next to the driver, the minute I dozed off, I was awakened by shouts of '*Ganga maiya ki jai*' by an energetic co-traveller. When I protested he promptly pointed to the sign that it was forbidden to sleep next to the driver! What else could I do, but join the chorus!

Along with Sudarshan Parbat we were to attempt six other peaks surrounding the Swetvarn Bamak. Saife (6161 m) was climbed in 1978 by 'Diganta', Calcutta. The Koteshwars were climbed many times. All the other peaks were virgins. Gangotri glacier itself is a sight beyond words. Flanked by beautiful and imposing peaks, it is fed by numerous side glaciers, which in turn are fed by other smaller glaciers. We were to proceed into the Raktavarn Bamak which joins the main glacier. Then to turn north to enter the Swetvarn Bamak. The route all along is one filled with moraine and colours which justify the names of the Bamaks.

We reached Lanka. Spending the night there the first meal of the expedition of 'chapatti, dal and rice' was served. The French ate with delight. While they waited for the next 'course' we went off to sleep. They were to learn that we Indians eat all things together and there are no courses. They adapted very well to the Indian food and the living off the country. On 6 May we started trekking to Gangotri. The temple was to reopen on the same day after a closure of six months due to winter. We joined the colourful and musical procession. There is no denying the fact that the pilgrims on foot look far more genuine than the pilgrims in the bus. Particularly when you don't have to jostle and rub shoulders with them.

At Gangotri the local tourist chief invited us to tea. 'Only I serve tea made from cow's milk, all the rest use milk powder' he told us, secretly. Sipping the holy tea we heard the chants of the opening of the temple. Suddenly the clouds cleared. Behind the temple we saw, for the first time, Sudarshan Parbat—truly a beautiful mountain.

Anyone climbing in the Gangotri area cannot but be impressed by the mythology. Sudarshan is a weapon which Lord Krishna or Vishnu holds in his hand. It is released in the ultimate crisis. When released

the victory is certain. The whole area throbs with many such mythological tales. The other peaks in Swetvarn Bamak were named according to these stories.¹ We drank a toast in holy tea and started off.

At Gangotri we ran into the second of our difficulties. This time it was the mules. A tilted bridge stopped the caravan which we disbanded. Immediately the 'sphagetti technique' (pulling from the front—pushing from the back) was applied. Bernard, Rodhan, I and others started pulling from Gaumukh. Danthi, Hubert and Dr. Desai pushing from Gangotri. By the time all 2000 kgs of our luggage arrived at Gaumukh, we had reccecd a site for the base camp on the Raktavarn Bamak at 4800 m.

At Gaumukh the road ends for the pilgrims. Gangotri glacier showed its teeth in a full measure. The track went over moraines of the type to put anyone in problems. We turned east to enter the Raktavarn Bamak. It lived up to its name. Kami discovered a gully which avoided a long scree slope. We were established on the 12 May on a huge open plateau, covered with snow. We were 2 km ahead of the usual camp site near Thelu Bamak and 1 km before the turning into the Swetvarn Bamak. Except four, all other porters were discharged.

On 14 May we had the first look at the entrance to the Swetvarn. At once we realized why the local people had advised us against it. A gigantic moraine slope followed by a series of steps in the glacier faced us. The route was non-existent and the slope was continuously bombarded by loose stones. The latter half was snow-covered. A long ridge ultimately led to the centre of the Bamak. Here it divided in two sections. We established ABC here at 5400 m. It was a most unpleasant and horrid climb to ABC. And we had to repeat it many times. Slowly ABC was well stocked. Then we did not have to tread on this route. But kudos to Bernard. He courageously went down once to BC to rest and shave !

The scene at ABC was grand. To the northwest lies Sudarshan Parbat with its east ridge leading straight up. Saife was almost due west. A gentle yet deceptive peak. Koteswar I was 'snowy' while Koteswar II 'rocky' with a steep fall in the south to BC. This was the scenario towards the western section of the Bamak. Towards the east, the Bamak was gentler. On the dividing ridge at first rose Swetvarn and then Chaturbhuj. Shyamvarn Bamak was to the east with a peak

1. See explanation for names at the end of this chapter.

on the watershed. Yogeshwar dominated the northeast, and the Shyamvarn Bamak.

Once well entrenched at ABC, we started to look around. And the whole place came alive. We divided into many parties to do small climbs, skis and to get familiar with the surroundings. This trend was to continue all along the expedition. From ABC each team was on its own and only for Sudarshan Parbat we regrouped ourselves in full strength. It was a methodical madness—alpine style indeed. We had a pool of equipment for all to borrow from. A day was spent in 'snow-school'. Everyone grew familiar with the techniques and the equipment. We soon discovered that the major difference was in the equipment. Alain could use an ice-axe like an artist. By a mere feather touch it would hold in the ice. Whereas the Indian-made ice-axe, the harder you bang the more it will bounce back. The rest was a case of sheer stamina and of learning.

During these days we had many 'kitchen talks'. The subjects varied from Indian philosophy to French wines. But most of the time luckily remained somewhere in the middle. That ensured the proper functioning of both the teams. These were truly the great days.

Within a few days we had an *embarras de richesses* of the mountains. More than we could deal with. With everybody properly acclimatized we started climbing.

Koteshwar (c. 6080 m)

The first and the final honours were reserved for this often climbed peak. All the previous ascents were from the side of Thelunala. We were to the east of it. Alain and Jacques left early on 19 May followed by Bernard and Kanu. The route went up the gentle east face and then followed the south ridge. The first team reached the summit at 9 a.m. just in time to see Hubert on the adjoining peak Saife. The second team gave up the climb to run down due to Hubert's fall on Saife. This peak was then attempted on the last day of the expedition at ABC on 7 June by Boga and Vijay, who got within 60 m of the top.

Saife (6161 m)

On 19 May, Hubert made a solo ascent. From ABC he proceeded on to the western glacier and climbed the snow-slopes to reach the ridge connecting Saife with Koteshwar I. At exactly 8.50 a.m. he was on the top to wave to Alain and Jacques on Koteshwar I.

Three of us were proceeding to Camp 1 on the glacier below. We saw Hubert begin to ski from the summit of Saife at 9 a.m. In 2 minutes he was 100 ft lower and in the process caused a giant avalanche. It was scary for him as well as for us. Slowly after 15 agonizing minutes the small dot moved. He removed his skis and climbed down. He came out of the line of the avalanche debris. We were frantically waving hands to guide him to avoid the avalanche route. After 50 minutes he was with us sharing his charmed existence. Our reunion at ABC with the Koteswar party was joyous. They had given him up for dead.

Saife was again climbed on 30 May by Kanu, Danthi and Kami. They had established a camp at the foot of the ridge, then followed the same route to the summit, leisurely watching the climbers progressing on the nearby Sudarshan Parbat.

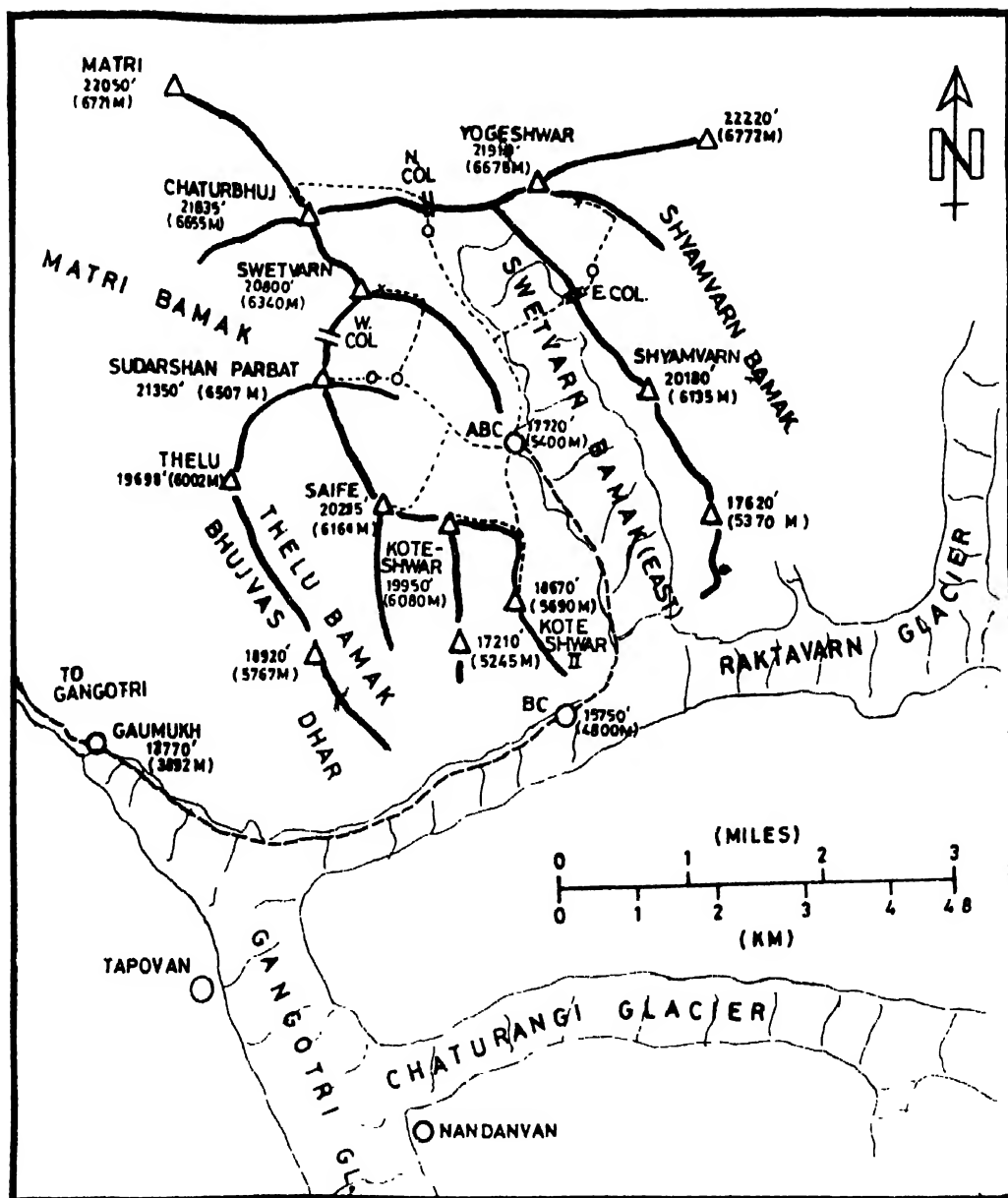
The third time this peak received a blitzkrieg attack. On 7 June Alain and Jacques left ABC at 4 a.m. and reached the summit at 6.30 a.m. and were back in the camp for breakfast at 8.30 a.m.! A terrific speed even for a well acclimatized party. Thus the peak had three very different styled ascents. All the time while it was climbed some other climb was always in progress!

Koteswar II (5690 m)

This is a peak south of Koteswar I. On 24 May Vijay, Kami, Nawang and I started from ABC to reach the Koteswar col by 9.30 a.m. We proceeded on loose snow and to the final 150 m section of the rocks. It was an enjoyable climb. But one had to be careful for a fall would lead down to the glacier. At 10.30 a.m. we were on the narrow top amazed at the magnificent panorama it unfolded. A few rappels and we were back at ABC.

Swetvarn (6340 m)

This peak at the centre of Swetvarn Bamak was the first to stop our line of successes. It has three ridges. The north joins Chaturbhuj, the southwest joins Sudarshan while the southeast falls between the two branches of the Swetvarn. The north and southwest ridges were found to be too sharp. On 25 May, Lakhpa, Kanu, Danthi and Jacques left early from Camp 1 (w). The ridge gradually rose to its full height. They slowly negotiated the sharp snow-ridge, always remaining on the east. But 100 m below the top, the ridge became razor-sharp and



Sudarshan Parbat area.

corniced. A 300 m fall was under the thin icy crust. Even if this was crossed at great danger, the slope ahead was of verglas and rose almost vertically. It was impossible to go further. After various observations later on too, no route seemed feasible over this or the other ridges.

Sudarshan Parbat (6507m)

With the acclimatization and the observations we had made, it was time to tackle our *ennemi redoutable*. As we look up from ABC, this huge mountain stands up majestically and in a stupendous shape. The east ridge falls steeply from its summit to touch the glacier floor at 5790 m. In portions it looks very sharp and steep. Our first move was to establish a Camp 1 (w) at the foot of the ridge. This was done after crossing heavily crevassed ground. On 21 May, Hubert and Alain started a climb on the rotten rocks at the bottom of the east ridge. After a series of very bad pitches they hit the upper snow. We could see them all along on this climb. They anchored a fixed rope from the ridge to Camp 1 (w). Next day we jumared up the fixed rope to the col on the ridge. It was a panting and breathless affair. The scenery, when one could spare a glance for it, was monumental. Dripping precipices soared for a 300 m or more on the Sudarshan slope with a mighty ice- and-snow rampart above that.

Proceeding on the ridge, came a mixed terrain of rock and snow. Ahead was the crux of the climb. A narrow ice-ridge which connected the east ridge to the main massif. It was only about 20 m in length. One had to traverse it precariously on the southern wall. Below was a direct fall of at least 600 m to the glacier. Alain and Hubert negotiated this patch with great expertise and care. It took them a thoroughly exhausting day. But when they accomplished this and returned, the deed, too was done. The route was opened with a fixed rope. Ahead was a very steep ice and snow slope leading to a small plateau above the north ice-face of Sudarshan. Once there, the route should be simpler. It was that satisfying moment that comes in any big venture when at last you have gone too far to turn back.

On 27 May it was decided to attempt Sudarshan Parbat from Camp 1 (w). Hubert and myself shared a tent and offered to wake up others at a little past midnight. The day died and the stars came out, peering frostily through the darkening canopy of the evening sky. The snow froze in its ruts. To keep the time proved to be unexpectedly difficult. During the anxious night the hours crept like ghosts around

the luminous dial of my watch and sleep totally eluded me. At 1 a.m. Hubert and I roused ourselves and in the effort to wake the others let forth such a chorus of yells that the ice-cliff above might have been tempted to respond in its own fashion. After a while all were ready but the sky was none too clear. The party left at 4 a.m. But by the time they reached the crux it was 10 a.m. The wind speed was high and the visibility became poor. The snow was too soft and the terrain dangerous. It was the east ridge after all. We all gathered back at the camp and went down to ABC for a rest.

On 29 May a strong well-rested party left for Camp 1 (w) for a renewed bid on Sudarshan. After a leisurely lunch at the Camp 1 (w) we decided to move the camp 300 m higher for one night. Nawang and I went up to this Assault Camp to help in whatever manner we could. Climbing in the evening on such steep soft slopes was rather exhausting. A small platform was cut out on the steep slope to pitch tents. Heart and lungs pounded alarmingly and a deadly fatigue encased the limbs as though one was working on a planet of abnormal gravity. By the time tents were up, Nawang and I went down to Camp 1 (w) to wait for their return.

30 May dawned exceptionally clear with no wind. I could see below three tiny dots on Saife, which was climbed by 8 a.m. But all our eyes, at ABC or Camp 1 (w) were trained on Sudarshan Parbat.

2 a.m. saw them arise to a crisp morning. After a breakfast the first party left their tents at 3.45 a.m. At the top of the first fixed rope they reached the col on the east ridge. They formed three ropes. Alain and Hubert in the lead, followed by Boga and Lakhpa and Jacques and Bernard. This initial climb was of 70 degrees for 100 m and in darkness took 25 minutes per climber. On the top of the east ridge a crescent moon greeted them with the dawn not far away. The ridge flattened out for about 30 m and then rose at an angle of 50 degrees over mixed terrain. After a climb of 150 m on this, they reached the crux, the razor-sharp section. On the fixed rope they moved on the southern side to traverse. With the earlier labours it was relatively easier but not simple in the usual terms. The route rose to 60 degrees on ice increasing to 70 degrees where it meets the large cornice which is the prominent feature of the northeast face. This cornice is topped by an easy-angled plateau of about 15 sq metres. Here they rested for a while. The route ahead rose again to about 50 degrees to follow a narrow ridge to reach a smaller platform on the west. They had traversed the entire mountain once again!

The summit was the end of the 75 degree rising ridge. One by one they moved over cautiously to the summit. It ought to have been an emotional moment. But weariness and altitude dull the emotions. There were too many dangers for any real demonstration of feeling—a rope to be tripped over, a cornice, equipment and cameras to be lost. But during those fleeting minutes of rest and success, while the body warmth drained away in cold gusts from space, there was a chance to reflect on and savour the climax to an incredible climb. At every moment the luck had held, the weather had obliged, we stood by each other and above all the mountain had quietly submitted in the days that we were there.

The view was grand. All the Gangotri peaks and the valley, a little of Tibet and all the neighbouring peaks were seen. It was a sight for gods. The south and north ridges looked very bad, while the west looked rather easy.

The descent was made very carefully and all the lower ropes removed. By 1.30 p.m. I could see those tired tiny dots increasing in size and we were together soon. Leaving all the equipment to be brought later, we walked down to ABC by the evening. All that remained was to clean our mugs thoroughly, and savour the French champagne!

Chaturbhuj (6655 m)

Sudarshan had two elderly neighbours. Both the peaks are hidden from view and hence perhaps not known. Otherwise they are both as challenging. During the early recce, a route was investigated over the eastern Swetvarn Bamak to the north col. Now Hubert, Alain, Jacques and Boga occupied Camp 1 (e) 5900 m. After the col, they had to descend 60 m of blue ice at an angle of 70 degrees to the north. After fixing the ropes and studying the route they returned. The next day Boga had to return to ABC due to a pain in his arm. A day before he had slaughtered and dressed a goat with a pen-knife. Kami all along in disagreement saying the gods would be angry. The curse had an effect.

On 5 June, the others left camp at 4 a.m. and reached the col over the fixed ropes by 5.30 a.m. After the icy descent they traversed on the upper snow towards the west over the hanging ice-blocks on the Guligad Bamak. They reached a little above the col with point 6381 m at about 6400 m at 9.30 a.m. It was a very tiring traverse over deep snow.



Sudarshan Parbat east face.

Now they were on the north ridge. They climbed three rope-lengths of 40 m each where the incline was 45 degrees with cornices on the east. The ridge becomes flat here till a little cornice 50 m below the summit. They traversed the plateau over the cornice at 11 a.m. The summit was a conical pyramid, very steep, 15 m long and 2 m high. Hubert made steps on the pyramid and one climber at a time stood on the summit at noon. After 15 minutes they climbed down towards the col. At 2 p.m. they started descending the col and after winding up the camp were at ABC at 6 p.m. A most prolific and energetic first ascent.

Yogeshwar (6678 m)

While others were at grips with Chaturbhuj, two Sherpas and I proceeded to attempt Yogeshwar, the highest peak in our area. We had recce'd the route to the east col previously. Now we descended the col on the upper plateau of Shyamvarn Bamak on the 5th. That evening I sat watching Kami and Lakhpa at work, improvising as perhaps only the Sherpas are capable of at this height. If the stove was tilted, a biscuit went underneath to straighten it, if the tent was torn a needle and thread was pulled out from the cap to repair it. But with all these, one knows that in the days of the technical and alpine-style climbing they are a diminishing race and soon their like will be rarely seen.

The 6th was cloudy. But as it cleared later, we left at 7 a.m. and climbing a steep ice-snow slope reached the southeast ridge. Then it was a long trudge along the ridge. About 300 m below the peak, Lakhpa stopped. He shouted back 'Ahead is a crevasse in which one could pitch 40 tents'. I came up, had a look and disagreed, 'Why only 40, it could certainly take 60 tents!' Withdrawal was imminent. The other lip of the crevasse rose steeply to the summit slopes. Anything falling from those slopes would make an icy grave for the crevasse climbers. With more time, it could be overcome. But here we were on the adjoining glacier and too far away from ABC. These are the perils of the alpine style. This was the final *coup de grâce*.

7 June was Dr. Desai's 64th birthday and he decided to climb to 5790 m and scare us. While Boga and Vijay attempted Koteswar, he waited 5 hours on the ridge amidst some fine scenery. He fell and fractured his left wrist. As the climbers did not return till late we sent the Sherpas to help them. But they had just returned with me from the attempt on Yogeshwar and hence took things easy. Soon the sun

disappeared and it was a mini-emergency. A thoroughly disgruntled Jacques led all of us up. We met Boga leading Dr. Desai, who though in pain was cheerful. During the next hour Dr. Desai was roped down in high spirits. Hubert kept on reminding him that the attitude that nothing has happened could lead to something happening! Anyway, ultimately it was a safe and happy birthday party at ABC.

As we sat watching the last sunset on Sudarshan, we could reflect on the happy days we had spent together. Whether it was the holy tea or the lucky train or the mangoes, we were fortunate ! We said *au revoirs* to each other and another trip went down into memory.

Note on the Nomenclature

In this area, of all the peaks attempted, only one was named on the Survey of India maps, that is Sudarshan Parbat. It was confusing to refer to the various peaks by heights alone. Moreover in the recent survey maps the heights of the various peaks differ from the old maps. This added to the confusion. Hence the peaks around the glacier were named in accordance with the guidelines by the Surveyor-General of India as published in *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XXXI, p. 344.

- 1) It was ascertained that no local names exist for any of these peaks.
- 2) The names are appropriate to the surroundings and the nomenclature of the area as explained below.
- 3) The names have appropriate meanings in the local language.

The following peaks were named as under:

<i>Unnamed peak (in metres)</i>	<i>Name proposed</i>	<i>Map reference</i>	<i>Location from Sudarshan Parbat</i>
6655	Chaturbhuj	53 N/1	North
6678	Yogeshwar	53 M/4	Northeast
6340	Swetvarn	53 N/1	North- northeast
6135	Shyamvarn	53 N/1	East
6161	Saife	53 N/1	South- southeast
5690	Koteshwar II	53 N/1	Southeast

All the peaks lie between longitudes 79° 5' to 79° 10' and latitudes 30° 55' to 31° 0'.

A point c. 6080 m southeast of Sudarshan Parbat is locally known as '*Koteshwar*'—though not marked on the map.

Explanations for the Names

All the peak names in the Gangotri area are based on Hindu mythology and gods. Towards the south a name like Chaukhamba is for Brahma, the creator. Towards the west, Shivling stands for Shiva, the destroyer. The only peak named in our area towards the east is Sudarshan Parbat. Sudarshan is the weapon of Lord Krishna or Vishnu, the preserver. Hence the peaks are named accordingly.

Chaturbhuj. 'One with four hands.' This is a name of Vishnu who has four hands and holds the Sudarshan. This peak has four distinct ridges falling in four directions. Thus both mythologically as well as topographically the name is appropriate.

Yogeshwar is a name of Krishna, in a serene mood. Thus it applies to this high snowy peak.

Saife in local language and Hindi means 'sword.' This is the weapon carried by Rama, who is known as 'God with the fair complexion'—Swetvarn. This peak lies near Koteshwar—'God of the edges.' Thus with its sword-edge-like ridge, the name is appropriate.

Swetvarn is named after the glacier. It stands in the centre and at the head of the glacier. The ridge from this peak divides the glacier.

• *Koteshwar II* is the peak south of the main ridge of Koteshwar.

The glaciers in this area are named after their appearance—Raktavarn (with reddish complexion), Swetvarn (with white complexion)—and they conform to these names in reality. The glacier to the east of the Swetvarn valley was unnamed on the map. This is a large valley with many peaks and is as big as Swetvarn. Yogeshwar peak lies at the head of it. This valley is blackish in appearance due to lack of snow and the presence of black rocks. Hence it was named '*Shyamvarn Bamak*' (with a dark complexion). Shyamvarn is descriptive of a dark Krishna also.

The peak on the watershed divide between the two Bamaks was named '*Shyamvarn*' after the glacier.

6

Youth in Gibson's Garhwal

The Ruinsara Youth Expedition

1984

THE SPRINGS of enchantment lie within ourselves;
they arise from our sense of wonder, that most
precious of gifts, the birth-right of every child.

Thus wrote Eric Shipton. It is no wonder that many a young person is attracted to the hills. If they are exposed at the right age, the wonderful world of the mountains is theirs for a lifetime. It was with this aim that we planned a Himalayan trip with young friends. The main aim was to introduce, train and give exposure to high altitudes to a selected team of youngsters between the ages of 16 to 21. They had been trekking and climbing with us in the local hills for some years and were sufficiently motivated to undertake such a trip. It was felt, as proven later, that a good standard of expertise can be achieved rather quickly by such a personalised training programme. We were running a training course and expedition together.

Though mountaineering has been practised for many years now in India, the social and parental attitudes differ widely. It is termed as a 'very risky' sport. Our young group hailed from a variety of backgrounds. Some were fortunate enough to be encouraged by their parents, some had a lukewarm response, others' parents were worried and at least one set of parents were down-right hostile and even threatened us through a lawyer. However these attitudes were braved and had almost no psychological effect while on the mountains. The ultimate age group was 8 to 68 years and the climbing abilities varied from a first Himalayan visit to experienced stalwarts. The combination was beneficial to both.

Once the idea germinated we looked for the area. What could

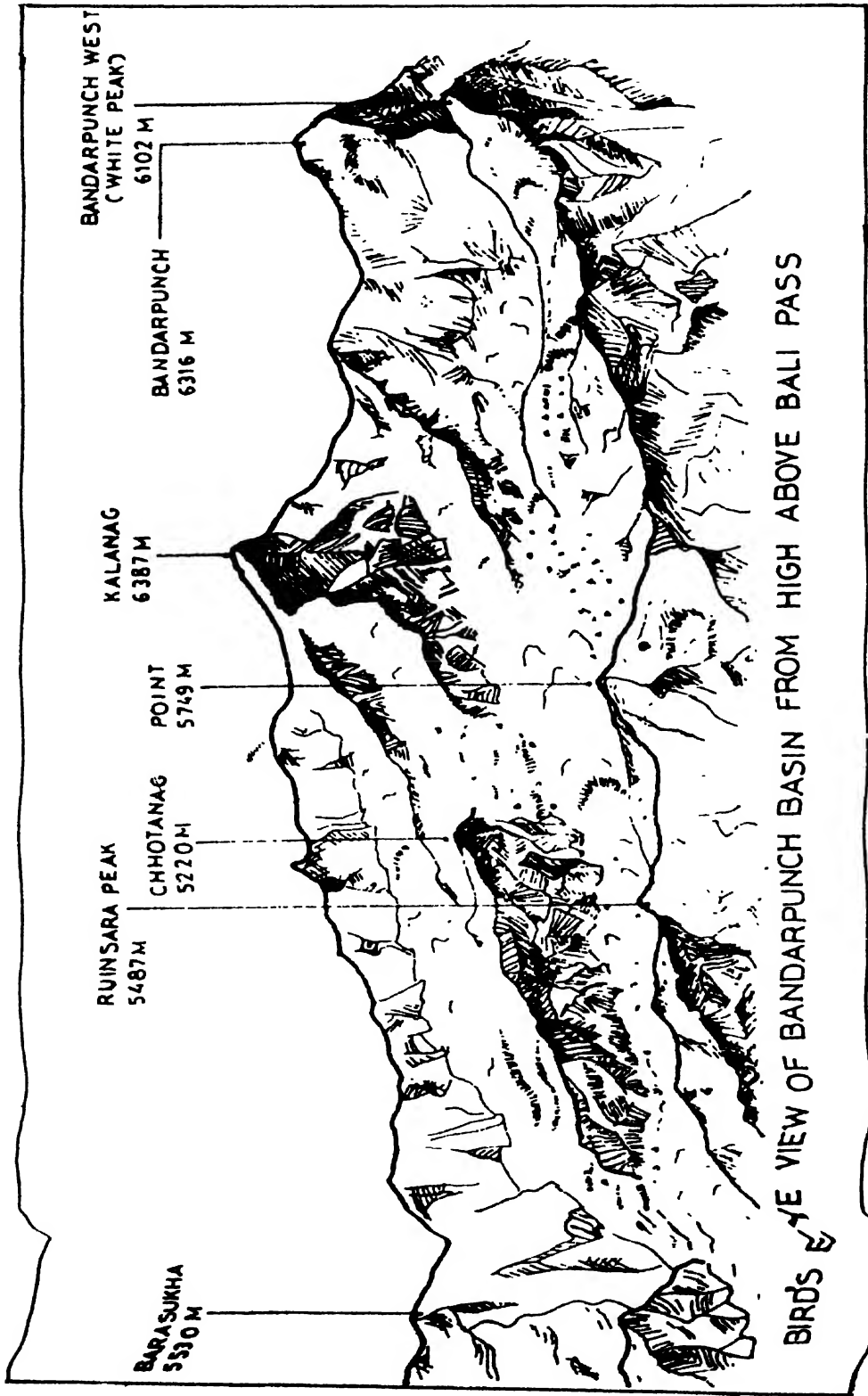
be better than to follow the footsteps of J.T.M. Gibson and J.A.K. Martyn, who pioneered such youthful ideas many decades ago? They were the first in introducing the young to the mountains and mountaineering, long before it received the official encouragement and recognition. We decided to literally follow their footsteps to Ruinsara valley and climb Kalanag and Bandarpunch West. Gibson led a party of school boys from Doon School to this area. He introduced them early to the pleasures of climbing, nature and camp-life. No wonder the class he generated were Gurdial Singh, Cheema, Jagjit and the like. We borrowed details from his autobiography *As I Saw It* and made an expedition card from a painting of Swargarohini he possessed. Not to be outdone, just after us a 14-year old Doon School boy climbed Kalanag and kept the Gibson legacy truly alive.

Youth took over right from the beginning, discovering strength and fun as planning went along. After the usual hectic activity we put the last lock on the kit-bags and departed on 8 May 1984, for Dehradun and proceeded to Sankri. In 3 days, via Taluka, Osla and Ruinsara lake, we established a base at 3840 m in upper Ruinsara valley. After 3 days of ferrying loads ABC was occupied at 4025 m and we were ready for the mountains. This year was one of the very 'dry' years and the snow-line was at about 4900 m. Every afternoon the air was filled with dry sand from the falling moraine walls. On the credit side it gave us clear skies and a 'clean' glacier all through our stay.

During the next 3 days we receded the place and started training in various aspects of mountaineering. The training included almost everything that one should know like practical climbing, theoretical aspects and various natural phenomena. These were happy days together, filled with activities, laughter and wise-cracks in the evening. The ladies produced delicious dishes, good enough to match Jagdish's observations on Swargarohini or Vasantbhai's philosophical interludes. The days were best summed up by one of our youngest members, Prashant: 'Up to now we were like frogs in a well; never knew such a world existed.'

Ruinsara Peak (c. 5480 m)

On 22 May we started the action. Arun left with Ravi, Kartik and Hina to climb this peak. They descended to the glacier and crossed the lower moraine to the true left. They camped at an exposed place but retreated. Eventually on 23 May the summit was reached by climbing the southeastern slopes.



Kalanag (6387 m) (Black Peak)

On 26 May, Dhiren, Gigi, Kartik and I left for the highest peak of the area. After Camp 1 at 4880 m, we established Camp 2 at 5550 m. The route initially crossed a crevasse-filled snowfield and then went up to the left. Camp 2 was set up about 450 m below the col. Dhiren and Kartik opened route upto the col that evening. We were discovering the benefits of mixing youthful energies and experience. The mountain opened up its secrets to an experienced eye while the strength of the young solved problems easily.

We left for the summit at 5 a.m. the next day. Gigi returned after an hour while the others reached the col in 2 hours. A bergschrund divided the summit ridge. By the time we crossed it, the weather deteriorated and we called it off for the day.

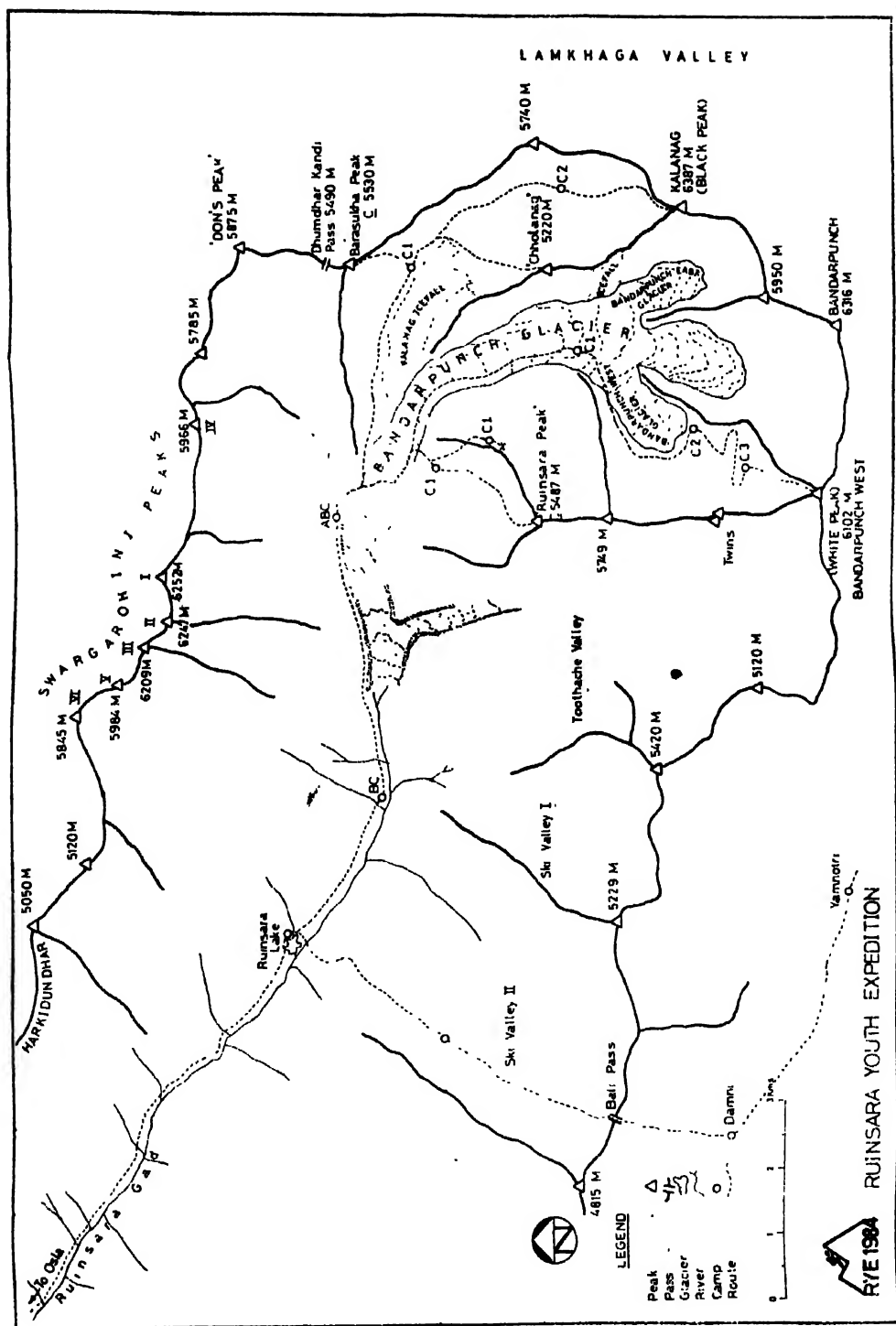
29 May was the summit day. By 10 a.m. we were across the bergschrund and Kartik energetically led to the ridge and above through soft snow. Gigi again stopped 100 m below the summit and almost froze while waiting for us to return from the summit. We reached the summit at 4.45 p.m. in howling winds and with loose powdery snow blowing on our faces. Gigi had to be pushed down. We were worried for her safety as she looked pale and disoriented. However she was not the one to be defeated. She matched the boys in strength and stamina, and if ever beaten by a male would retort; 'So what, you are a guy'. Things were better as we reached the col and back to Camp 2 absolutely tired. Dhiren put some food on the stove and dozed off. What a mess in the mess!

In the next two days Arun, Ravi and Sher Singh climbed Kalanag. They were lucky to get clear views and bright sunshine. This was a particularly happy day for Ravi, who was one day short of his 18th birthday. He had turned into a strong climber and used his strength to great advantage for the team. As a quarter-master he had planned tempting menus, and needless to say, ate most of the food himself.

Barasukha (c. 5530 m) and Chhotanag (5220 m)

We all gathered at Camp 1. On 1 June two teams left for the above peaks.

Barasukha is the highest peak on the ridge above Camp 1 leading to Dhumdhar Kandi pass. Dhiren and Gigi left at 8 a.m. to go up a moraine slope of 60 m. This led them to the top of the ridge where



Ruinsara-Bandarpunch valley.

they roped up due to the exposure. Here on they had to proceed carefully with crampons and belay on a thin layer of ice and scree. The summit was reached at 12.30 p.m. They were elated, naturally so, as this was the only peak climbed by the 'youth' on their own.

For Chhotanag, Milind and Pratap Singh crossed the crevasse-filled snow-slope to move to the western end. They climbed a sharp ridge, roped up, to the top. They could look down on the entire Bandarpunch glacier.

With this our training phase ended. A team under Jagdish Nana-vati had already left for the green pastures of Har-ki-Doon. Others joined them. We now planned to tackle a difficult mountain.

Bandarpunch West (White Peak) (6102 m) (First ascent)

This peak lies to the SW of Kalanag. It had defeated one attempt. In June, 1950 J.T.M. Gibson with Tensing Norgay (of Everest fame and in pre-Everest strength) attempted it from the south. They were defeated by vertical walls and ice-gullies. Between us and this formidable peak lay a 12 km long Bandarpunch glacier, totally broken and crevasse-filled. Moreover Bandarpunch had not been attempted from this side at all. We had observed the mountain from various angles and noted that there were two broken icefalls to be negotiated, one at the junction of Bandarpunch glaciers and the other above it.

Arun, Dhiren, Kartik and I left ABC on 5 June and moved into the glacier. We were engulfed by thick fog and hence progress was slow. We moved along the true left moraine but at the same time maintaining a distance from the nearby crumbling steep walls. We were soon stopped by a number of wide crevasses. We had to retrace our steps a few times, ultimately reaching a col at the bottom of the rocky ridge leading to the peak 5749 m. Due to the dry summer deep crevasses were open and we could cross or jump across them. A little snow-cover would make them a most tricky proposition, as we were to discover on our return. We moved to the left and pitched Camp 1 at 4630 m on the moraine. To our right the icefall from Bandarpunch West glacier descended.

We now had two alternatives, either to proceed straight up the glacier or to turn to the west glacier. After a day of recce, we preferred the latter course. We followed a moraine ridge and crossed a wide crevasse field on the top of the west glacier to camp at 5300 m.

Ahead another small but vicious-looking icefall barred our way. On 8 June, we moved into that. After many a false lead, we could find

a route. But that would entail us descending into a wide crevasse and going across 110 m at the bottom. A ticklish affair which we accomplished the next day with fixed ropes.

On 9 June, Dhiren led across with Arun and me and we were settled at Camp 3, 5670 m, at the foot of the northern slopes of the peak.

10 June was again a 'peak day' for us. We left at 6 a.m. and climbed 150 m on a wall with crampons to gain the NE ridge. Once there the snow became soft and the weather cloudy. We could climb avoiding a few crevasses and finally reached the corniced top at 9.45 a.m. We had a view of the steep drop to the southern valley, adjoining ridge of Bandarpunch and of the distant Swargarohini peaks. It was a happy moment for all of us, particularly for Dhiren as this was his first virgin. He was deeply moved. Well, if you are just turning 20, you have prepared hard, fought against jaded attitudes—then you are entitled to a tear or two. We were back to Camp 3 by 1 p.m. to stay the night.

11 June gave us some anxious moments. By 7 a.m. we recrossed the fixed ropes and were proceeding down. I fell and dangled in a crevasse to be pulled out by Dhiren and Kartik. Below at Camp 2 it started snowing in earnest making it difficult to see the route and crevasses. After a little excitement we managed to reach the green grass of ABC by evening.

Bali (Yamnotri) Pass (c. 4880 m)

Gibson had described a high pass leading to Yamnotri from Ruinsara valley. It followed 'Ski Valley II' from the lake. Dhiren and I decided to return via this route.

We moved the camp to the foot of the pass on 16 June, following a moraine ridge. On 17th after a small traverse we climbed across a prominent bergschrund. By 8 a.m. we were at the pass. Views were excellent on the other side as we descended on steep scree to reach the grassy slopes and flowers. A rock-ridge above Damni presented problems, but by 1 p.m. we were on the old pilgrim route to Yamnotri. It was dirty and stinking and we cancelled any idea of a holy bath to rush down to Janki chatti and Hanuman chatti.

By now we suffered, what Gibson would term, 'the call of the flesh-pots'. So, it was back to Dehradun and home. At the end we could say to each other what Lord C. Schuster said of the mountains:

Always alluring though they flout you; always dear
though they slay you; they give you strength and
friends and happiness; and to have known them is
indeed a liberal education.

7

Rescue on Devtoli

1974

IT WAS a cool morning and as the first rays of the sun entered the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, I was being tied to an improvised stretcher and carried on strong shoulders of our Garhwali porters. The route was narrow and full of scree. I had to keep my eyes closed all the time, or else, with the wobbling, I would feel as if Nanda Devi towering over us was falling on me. All the time I was shouting in pain, but the porters were told to ignore my agony and continue. This was the only way they could have carried me. It was six days since I had fallen in a crevasse on my way back from the first ascent of Devtoli (6788 m) and injured my left hip. After months of planning, we had succeeded in climbing this remote peak in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary and it was in the fading evening that the goddess chose to wake up in defence at this violation of her sanctity. My painful ride was over at the base camp and I was installed in a red tent on a huge grassy plateau to wait for the helicopter to rescue me. Boga stayed with me while the others started the return march. My thoughts then would have defied a psychiatrist. Neither the golden sunsets on Nanda Devi nor the roar of the Rishi ganga mattered to me now. My thoughts centered around the helicopter and in my day-dreams hundreds of times I escorted the helicopter into the Sanctuary. A flutter of the tent flap, noise of a stove or a distant roar of an avalanche would wake me up, hopefully searching the sky. It was night and I had had my usual heavy dose of sedatives to relieve pain. My thoughts lingered on to those none too distant days when we had happily started our mountain adventure.

Ours was an experienced team of six climbers. Three of us had been in the region before, which was an added advantage. 'Appetite

grows with what it feeds upon, not by waiting'¹ wrote H.W. Tillman in his account of the first visit to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in 1934. This was exemplified by our expedition, as it was possible to go to these mountains after years of groping around them.

Our peak lies at the southernmost point on the inner wall of the Sanctuary. It is on the south-southwest ring of peaks in line with Maiktoli and Mrigthuni (6803 and 6855 m respectively). It is at the junction where the ridge from Devistan joins in the south, the ridge between Maiktoli and Mrigthuni. So it stands overlooking the Sanctuary on the east, Trisul nala, in the west and Sunderdhunga-Tharkot directly, below to the south. It could also have been approached from Trisul nala, but we chose to enjoy the Nanda Devi Sanctuary as well. We called our unnamed peak 6788 m. 'Devtoli' after a mixture of Devistan-Maiktoli.²

We were at Rishikesh on 20 May. A day of hectic purchases followed in the intense heat and we reached Joshimath with 1½ tons of luggage on the 21st evening.

Here, we encountered our second hurdle. We were shunted back to Gopeshwar—the local headquarters—to obtain the inner line permits. There they promptly told us that it was a mistake and that the permits would be issued by the authorities in Joshimath alone. We came back only to be told that the S.D.M. had gone to Badrinath. We rushed to Badrinath, the S.D.M. signed the permits and we travelled back all night by truck to reach Joshimath the next day by noon. We had lost 4 days to obtain a small piece of paper called a permit, which, to our great disappointment, nobody checked anywhere. However, the delay was more than compensated, since our Sherpas, whom we had given up on in the wake of the rail strike, joined us here.

It was drizzling when we reached Lata, our last roadhead, on the afternoon of 25 May and camped on the roadside. Our porters, Kedar Singh, Bhim Singh, Jagat Singh and the rest, were waiting for us with Mangal Singh and his goats to carry our luggage.

We were off early next day in drizzling rain with about 150 goats and 22 porters carrying our loads. The route climbed steeply 1500 m to Lata Kharak, just above the tree line. Next day morning, we had a

1. *H.J.*, Vol. VII, 1935, p. 1.

2. We are also proposing this name to the Survey of India through official channels, as it sounds most suited to the surrounding region. (The suggestion has subsequently been accepted by the Survey of India—*Ed.*)

clear view to Bethartoli Himal (6352 m), Nanda Ghunti (6309 m), Hathi Parbat (6727 m) as we continued our climb further to Durashi pass (4267 m). It was a steep tricky route covered with patches of snow. The other side of the pass was even worse, as we went down over across to this alp of Durashi. A gentle climb to Malathuni pass (4267 m) the next day and we had the first glimpses of Nanda Devi. It was still early in the morning. The sky was brilliantly clear. Dunagiri and Hanuman on the east had a halo of sunrays around them. To the south, Devistan, Trisul and Bethartoli glittered in the morning light. Below, Dibrugeta alp nestled among a thick forest of pine, fir and birch, eagerly awaiting our arrival. We ran down. The camp was pitched in the thick forest. The next day saw us climbing again 350 m above the tree line, to have a grand view of the region around and by the end of the route we were descending to camp across the Rishi ganga at Deodi. Above Deodi our route was along a thick forest of rhododendrons and bhoj trees. At the junction of Trisul nala and the Rishi, we had first views of the Rishi gorge. We built a small bridge across the Trisul and by afternoon we were at Ramani at the foot of the gorge. Goats cannot go any further, so we sorted out the luggage, and the rations required for the return journey and buried them safely nearby. We made two lots of the remaining luggage. All the equipment and food for about 10 days were to go up first and the balance was to be ferried later on.

The Rishi gorge looked very steep and frightening from here. There is a faint track all along now, but it requires constant concentration and balance, if you slip, there is nothing to stop you from going into the Rishi ganga 900 m below. The route, a mixture of rock, scree and grassy turfs resembles trekking in the western ghats around Bombay. The route from Ramani climbs rather steeply, at first under an overhang and then on a mixture of grass and rock. It then follows a dry stream upwards, leading to steep grassy slopes again. One reaches a huge cairn, which marks the end of the first part of the climb for the day. Looking back, we had an excellent view of the 'curtain wall' of Malathuni and peaks of the Badrinath region. Now the real ruggedness of the gorge starts, as the route traverses over rocks and scree with one side exposed to the Rishi ganga now about 1500 m below. You keep on jumping over rocks, climbing up and traversing on a very narrow track. You reach a small open ground, 'Bhujgara' on the 'Mid-day Camp' as Tillman called it, rather too soon. We reached early, before noon, but there was no way of camping ahead. This is not a very

inviting camp site, camping on scree slopes and our tents had to be pitched far away from each other.

We started early and at first had to cross a snow-filled gully. The gorge was getting narrower. By about 9 a.m., we were at the base of 'the slabs'. Here we had to fix ropes extensively. You take a sharp turn and climb a scree slope. Then traverse about 150 m first under an overhanging rock and then over a huge rock face full of sloping rocks, on which you can get only undercut as hand tools. We had fixed ropes on each of these sections and thank God that it was sunny, as with snow or rain, they can be almost impossible to negotiate. We took 2 hours to cross the slabs. Now we were really in it. The north side of the gorge was terribly steep and presented a grand sight. We found the remains of winter snow on the sides of the track. Rishi gorge would be a tough proposition any time before the third week of May, when it is snow bound. We reached the base of 'Vaikunth Gully' (ladder to heaven). This is a steep rock staircase leading halfway to a huge rockwall and then traversing. The final climb was rather steep. Suddenly Nanda Devi opened before us, presenting a stupendous bold front. Our camp was at Patakhani (3962 m) which the early travellers called 'Pisgah' camp, the promised land of the Sanctuary. But, we were to discover at the cost of our tired feet next day, how very long the promised land was.

Next day, we sent down all except 3 porters from Patakhani to Ramani for carrying the remaining loads through the gorge, while the rest of us ferried loads to base camp. It was a very tiresome route, which went up and down over scree and boulders till one takes a turn to the south to enter Sarso Patal or the Sanctuary grassy lands. But yet there is no end to it. We did not make it to the base camp site that day and dumped our loads a short distance before. It rained heavily in the afternoon and it was six weary gentlemen who walked to the 'Pisgah' camp. Our porters had arrived from Ramani bringing the total gear.

3 June dawned clear and fine. We started early and with all our luggage established the base camp by noon. Porters were paid off and we were sixteen only. We were at 4510 m near a huge level ground. Rishi ganga was about 300 m below. Immediately on the east, was the huge rockwall of Nanda Devi towering above us,—to the south was Cream Roll (6538 m), Nanda Khat (6611 m) and Sunderdhunga Khal (5520 m). About 5 km further to the south, was the meeting point of the two glaciers, south Nanda Devi glacier from the southeast, which leads to the Nanda Devi base camp, and the south Rishi glacier com-



Devtoli route of ascent.

ing from the south. Above the latter lay our peak along with Maiktoli. Nanda Devi turned absolutely golden in the setting sun.

The next day was absolutely clear. Boga and Subhash with Sherpa Nim Dorje and Kedar Singh left early to open a route to advance base camp. Within 2 hours they reached the meeting point of the two glaciers. They proceeded south along the left back of the glacier. They could avoid the moraines by climbing the slopes near the bank. It was a long march and they established ABC at 4877 m on a small open rocky ground. It was a wonderful place with excellent views of Nanda Devi (7816 m) and the Sunderdhunga Khal. They started back and had the first taste of what we came to call the 'Matinee Show'. Invariably, every day at about 1 p.m., the weather would become cloudy. By 1.30 p.m. it would start snowing with strong winds touching the height of almost a blizzard. It would subside by 3 p.m., leaving lots of snow. Evenings were always very clear. We noticed that this happened every day without fail.

While the ABC party rested, all of us ferried loads next day. We reached ABC at noon, had lunch and waited for the storm. It came and subsided on time and then we walked back. We made this a regular pattern of movements.

On the 6th, Doctor and myself stayed at the base camp, while all others occupied ABC. On the 7th, we also moved to ABC with the rest of the luggage. We calculated that we had sufficient supplies of food and fuel to sustain a determined assault. Boga and Subhash had gone up that very day and established Camp 1 at (5488 m) on the glacier. They reported that after traversing further on the slopes beyond ABC, they descended on the glacier and then climbed up over small crevasses to Camp 1. We discussed our plans in the evening. Next day, Mahesh and Dilip were to attempt Sunderdhunga Col opposite ABC, which did not look too difficult. I would ferry loads to Camp 1 with the porters. The day after, on the 9th, Boga, Subhash and myself were to occupy Camp 1 for the first attempt.

However, the next day dawned ominously with an overcast sky and we postponed our start till 8 o'clock. But it took a turn for the worse and we spent the day at the camp. As a result, we scrapped the attempt on Sunderdhunga Col and all of us ferried loads to Camp 1 on the 9th, as scheduled. Three of us were comfortably settled, enjoying good views of Nanda Devi, while the others returned to ABC.

The route to Camp 2 was through heavy crevasses and promised difficulties. We tried to push through the loads, but we ran into a huge

crevassed field within 200 m from the camp. We decided to leave the luggage there. With a Sherpa and 2 porters, I went ahead to open the route while Boga and Subhash waited in support. We had to jump over many crevasses and we proceeded very slowly and carefully on two ropes, belaying extensively. A route through the crevasses on the left was tried, but we had to retrace our steps. We found a ramp on the right which climbed steeply further up. We faced huge crevasses running across from top to bottom of the entire field. Luckily there was a snow bridge. Ahead was a steep slope of 100 m. On top of this, Camp 2 was established at (6190 m) on an icefield. We came down to Camp 1 by late afternoon. Ferry from ABC to Camp 1 had arrived on time. Boga, Subhash, Nim Dorje and Jagat Singh occupied Camp 2 on the 11 June while Mahesh joined me at Camp 1 to form the second summit team. It was remarkable that nobody felt any effect of altitude. The approach march is so naturally spread out as to acclimatize anyone thoroughly.

12 June was a clear day. Mahesh and I started for Camp 2 making brisk progress and reached the final crevasses by 11 a.m. We could see some strange movements above Camp 2. There were three climbers walking down slowly at the edge of a wall with a huge crevasse on the other side. They looked very tired and soon they disappeared behind the wall. What happened to the fourth guy? We were worried and started climbing fast. We were relieved to find Boga, who was unwell, at the camp. He told us that they started at 8 a.m. and ran into a huge crevasse. As the wind was too strong, they all came back to the camp. Subhash with Nima and Jagat started again at about 10 a.m. They must have crossed the crevasse by now. It all looked very dangerous from here. After some time, Kedar, Wangdi and myself started in support. Snow conditions were very bad and the afternoon snowfall had also started. But Mahesh and Boga located the party higher up and shouted at us to return. We waited at Camp 2 and by 3 p.m. they returned. They had climbed steadily on the other side of the crevasse up to about 100 m below the col between Maiktoli and Devtoli. As the weather worsened, they had to make a retreat from about 6400 m. Thus the first summit attempt failed. Mahesh and myself occupied Camp 2 with Nima and Jagat, while Subhash, Boga and the others went down to Camp 1.

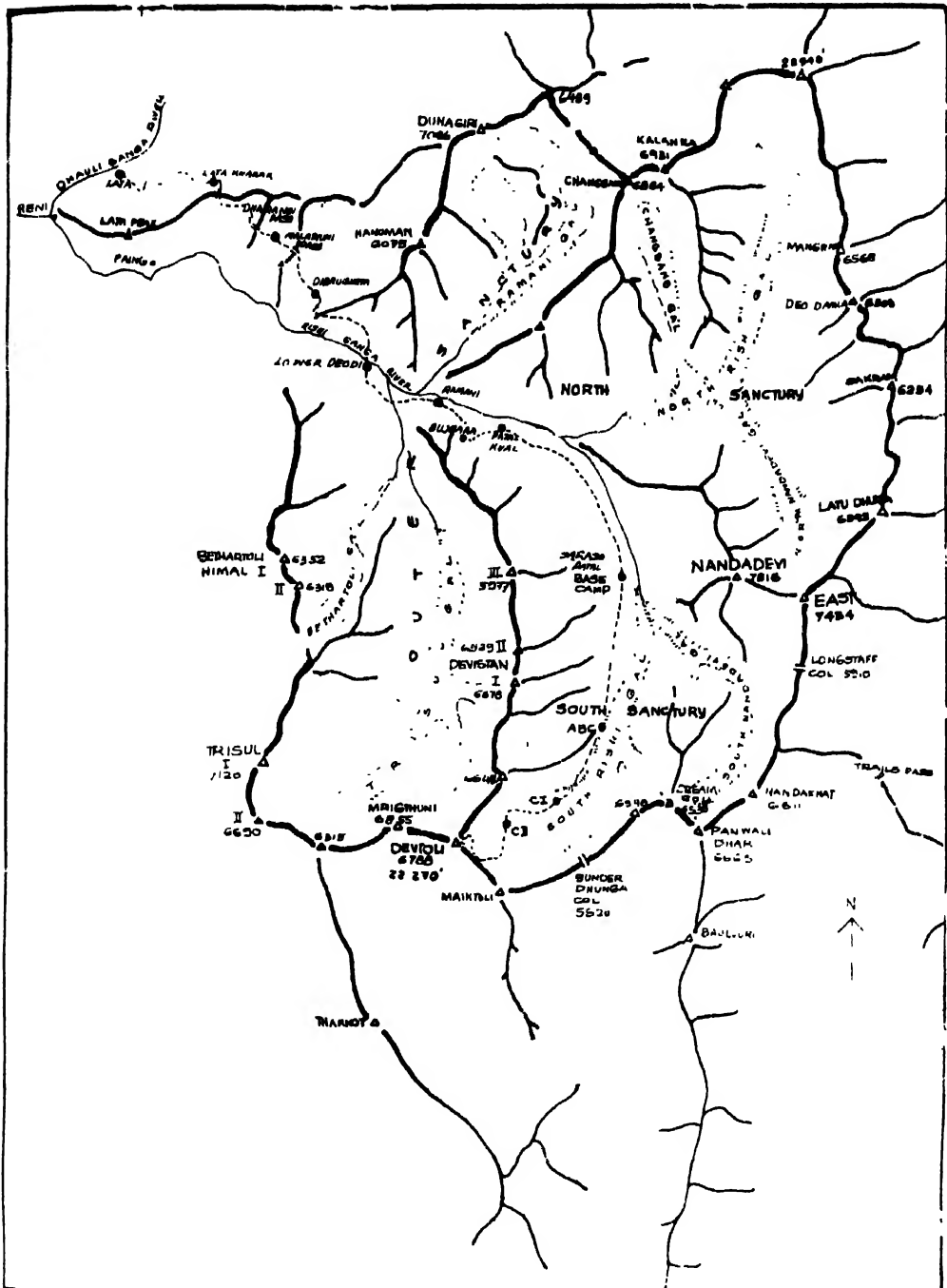
13 June was bright and clear. We were lucky as the strong wind, which was blowing all night eased by 7 a.m. We were off by 7.30 a.m. and climbed unroped to begin with. The route was well trodden

the day before and gentle, and this way we could climb relatively fast. We crossed over the crevasse which had stopped them yesterday and climbed steadily on the gradual snowfield on the other side. Over to our left at a distance were giant seracs which ultimately led to Maiktoli. The view was breathtaking and we made frequent halts to take photographs. Over the Sunderdhunga Col we could now see Nanda Kot and innumerable peaks of the lower Milam and Ralam glaciers. By 10 a.m. we reached the highest point of the previous day. From here on, we roped up. Snow was still only ankle deep and the wind increased. From the col, we could see all the southern valleys covered by clouds.

From the col which was about 6500 m, Devtoli presents itself as an ice pyramid about 3000 m high with a steep ice-wall abutting a gully between the summit and itself. The summit looked flat but corniced at the southern edges. Facing the strong wind, we started off, towards the steep ice-wall. Snow was now getting deeper and made our progress slow. A little above the base of the icefall, we traversed towards the north. It was covered with fresh snow but gave us excellent foot and hand holds with hard kicking and a little step cutting. We moved cautiously, one at a time and belaying with our ice axes firmly in anchor. We surmounted the wall and then it was a matter of some snow trodding and we were at the summit at 1 p.m.

As the summit was corniced, we proceeded on it with one of us always belaying from a distance. Though all the lower valleys were filled with clouds, we got an excellent view. To the north was Duna-giri (7066 m), Kalanka (6931 m), Kamet (7756 m), Devistan (6678 m), Changabang (6864 m) and the Hardeol group. To the west, Nanda Kot (6861 m) was shooting up from the clouds and the northwest was completely dominated by Nanda-Devi main and east. Nearby, on the east, was Maiktoli and on the west, Mrigthuni and Trisul (7120 m). We could see Trisul nala with its gentle approaches to Trisul, Mrigthuni and our peak. Bethartoli Himal was covered in clouds. There was only a sea of clouds to the south. We stayed on the summit for an hour. The snow had become very soft and on our way back, we took a direct line for descending to avoid the ice-wall and the col. By 4 p.m., we reached Camp 2 where the support team of Dilip and Boga was waiting. Some hot tea and we discussed plans. Boga, Dilip, Wangdi and Narain were to attempt Maiktoli the next day. It looked quite easy and nearer than our peak. By 5 p.m., four of us started for Camp 1, happy and tired. But the adventure was not yet over.

We climbed down about 100 m to reach the huge crevasse. Jagat, who was in the lead, checked the snow bridge, about 5 m wide and 4 m broad. He crossed it with ease and took a belay position. I also checked it, nodded to Mahesh for a belay and stepped on it. A slight sound, and the next moment I was dangling 10 m in the crevasse, held by belays from both the sides. The whole snow-bridge, which we used to cross all the time, had collapsed totally. Mahesh shouted 'Are you all right? We are holding you'. I looked around. Both sides were overhanging ice-walls. With my 70 kg and a rucksack of 20 kg the rope was pressing on my ribs, constricting my lungs slowly, but surely. I desperately tried to get a foothold, but to no avail. I shouted up to release the rope from Jagat's end so that I would not get the pull from both sides. Mahesh and Nirma tried pulling me up but the rope had cut in about 2 m deep in the snow at the edge of the crevasse and wouldn't budge. They started shouting for help to Camp 2. In the meantime, I was finding it increasingly difficult to breathe. My extremities were getting numb and I feared that I would be unconscious within a short time. I looked down the crevasse. It was wide and the bottom was of solid ice, covered with the snow of the bridge which had broken under me. It was too painful to hold out any more. I shouted up that I was cutting the rope and jumping about 15 m to the bottom. I figured it would be better than the pain and hanging unconscious at the end of a rope. I threw my ice axe away so that it would not hurt me. I could remove only the left strap of my rucksack and it remained hanging awkwardly on my right. I had a knife in my shirt pocket with which I cut the rope. The fall was violent and I fell on my left hip and slipped down further about 10 m. My rucksack was in front of me. I was conscious and shivering wildly, unable to move an inch. Tremendous pain shot through my left leg. I shouted up to Mahesh, telling him that I had broken my left leg and would need help. Pain and cold were increasing. It was 6 p.m. but still the sun was shining and I could not open my eyes. I heard some voices above as help from Camp 2 arrived. They threw a rope, but it just could not reach me. At last, Boga, who had arrived with others from Camp 2, rapelled into the crevasse. He immediately stuffed my mouth with chocolates and put me in a feather coat. That helped a lot. With two 60 m ropes, he tied me up with hand loops, immobilising my left leg. Five of them started pulling me: Pain was forgotten in the eagerness of being rescued. I reached the edge of the 25 m crevasse quickly but near the top, both the ropes had cut in about 5 m deep in the edges and



Nanda Devi Sanctuary.

I got jammed with my hands in the snow. They lowered me a bit. Wangdi came to the edge and started chopping the ice and snow around the two ropes, all of it falling directly on me. I called for another rope, with hand loops, which were passed underneath my hips and with the main rope I was brought to the edge and then with a strong pull on the second rope, I was jerked out, with my face falling flat on the ground in the arms of Dilip and shivering with pain and cold. Boga and my luggage were hauled out fast in the fading evening light. It was about 6.30 p.m. and the whole episode had lasted about one and a half hours. Nima and Dilip with Jagat, who were on the other side of the crevasse, made it to Camp 1 by 8 p.m. to get help for the morrow. Tents of Camp 2 were brought down and we camped at the upper edge of the crevasse.

Subhash and Kedar came up early next day. They made a sledge of a tent with poles, and tied ropes on both ends. I was tied in the centre with my injured leg remaining up. Pulling me was hard work in the soft snow and heavily crevassed region. At every crevasse they would bring me to the edge, then two persons would jump across. They would lift the sledge a little with the rope and there I would go, suspended in the air over the crevasse leaning heavily to the other side and screaming with pain. We had to cross at least thirty crevasses like this. That day we reached just above the huge crevasse field above Camp 1. It was noon and crevasses were too unsteady. So we camped there. The doctor who had come up to camp 1 could not reach me, so some sedatives were thrown across the crevasses. Next day by 6 a.m. we crossed the danger zone and wound up Camp 1. The doctor joined us here. My painful ride continued till the end of the snowfield on the glacier floor. Now it was a problem of carrying me over the rocks to ABC. The sledge if carried above would fold up giving me extreme pain. Again I was tied up in slings, immobilising my legs. A rope was passed from a karabiner in my waist, across my chest and over the shoulders. A porter would pull this rope over his shoulders with my back and head resting on his back and carry me. Someone had to hold my legs and I would transfer some of my weight with hand supports on persons on two sides. We could hardly go 50 steps like this before either the porter got tired or with the rope on my chest, I found it difficult to breathe. But slowly we crossed the moraine and reached ABC in about 3 hours. The doctor examined me and applied a temporary plaster. The cold nights were painful and sleepless, even with pain killers and sleeping tablets. Moreover, I could not straighten my

leg or sleep flat on my back. There was a lot of speculation on what my injury could be but one thing was sure that it was not a fracture.

Subhash and one porter were despatched to Joshimath to request for a rescue by helicopter from the base camp. He started on the 15th from ABC and went straight down the Rishi gorge to Ramami by evening. From Ramami, he went up and down two passes to reach Lata by late evening, thus covering a difficult march which had taken us nine days on the way up, in just two days. It was a most sustained and dedicated run. Through local authorities he contacted the Indian Mountaineering Foundation at New Delhi, who responded immediately, and a helicopter was arranged.

At ABC, the rescue continued. A small stretcher was improvised which allowed me to sit in the centre with four persons carrying it. It was a very scary thing to sit on as it slopped up and down with heavy jerks. On many steep ascents and descents, I was carried again on porters' backs. Progress was naturally very slow. I shouted in pain but they were told to ignore it and continue. By evening we came to a difficult crossing and Khim Singh who was in front slipped, dropping the stretcher. Pain shot up like a steel bar driven through me and I refused to be carried further that day. The tents were put up and I was left with the doctor and two porters. Others went down to the base camp.

On 18 June, another stretcher was made, this was a little better version and it allowed me to sleep in it. Thus after being carried for 6 days, I was installed at base camp as the others started the return march. It was a tremendous piece of mountain rescue from 6100 m to 4200 m over most difficult terrain. All the members, Sherpas and porters did a heroic job with calculated calmness in this remote corner of the Himalaya.

It was on the 20th at noon that Boga suddenly came running, shouting, 'Helicopter Helicopter!' I dragged myself out of the tent and it was the happiest sight of my life. As the helicopter took off, Nanda Devi was hidden in the clouds and my eyes searched towards our peak. Well, Devtoli, 'The honours are even'.³

We rushed through to Joshimath in 20 minutes and then to Bareilly. I was treated at the military hospital for the dislocated hip joint and hoped to be kicking again soon.

3. H.J., Vol. XXVIII, 1967-68, p. 112—words by Bob Pettigrew who also had a similar accident on Papsura.

Others arrived by the usual route back to Bombay. I had an extended vacation of 2 months in plaster with the thoughts of our climb and Nanda Devi Sanctuary to console me. Perhaps, it is a record that from 6400 m to my bedroom in Bombay, I hadn't taken a single step on my own legs !

8

After Devtoli

THE HELICOPTER circled thrice over the roof of the hospital. Lying on a stretcher on the floor of the copter I could see the giant red cross painted on the roof-tops to keep off the enemy planes.

'This is the standard practice. Whenever we bring a serious casualty we circle thrice so that all the emergency services are geared up', said the pilot.

I realised that I was the 'serious casualty'. Having fallen in a crevasse on Devtoli (6788 m) at 6400 m, I was carried down for 8 days on improvised stretchers, porters' backs and by other most painful means. Finally I was air-lifted from the Nanda Devi Sanctuary base camp at 4600 m after uncertainties of the rescue. It was lucky that I had survived at all but still I did not know the nature of the injury. I could not move my left leg and had not slept on my back for 8 days and nights, since 13 June 1974, the date of the accident.

At Bareilly Military Hospital, they had to rush me to an air-conditioned room immediately. The helicopter had taken me off from the base camp where the temperature was 8°C and here it was 45 C. By evening after the X-rays were taken it was discovered that I had dislocated my left hip-joint. The next day I was operated on (close reduction) and the joint was set right.

'The X-ray machine was not working but from the noise of the bones we knew that it was set right', the doctor informed me. I was put in a plaster-cast from my chest to below the knees and I totally weighed 120 kg. That night Dr. Rodhan Shroff, a surgeon and a friend from Bombay, arrived with my father. It was quite a relief to have someone you know beside you. He arranged to shift me to Bombay, a long way to home.

For the journey from Bareilly to Delhi a taxi was hired. The front

seat had to be removed to accommodate me, and the driver was tied at the waist with the wheel for support. But after the struggle of carrying me on the mountains, this was only a minor variation in the methods employed. At Delhi we changed to a train. I realised that people looked at me from above with curiosity as I stretched on the ground and was carried by porters.

A large number of friends awaited my arrival at Bombay. To bring me out of the compartment they had to carry me side-ways as the corridor was too narrow. The job was easily accomplished by my mountaineer friends. Luckily, the gloomy atmosphere changed and girls started teasing me. My wife Geeta was climbing on Deo Tibba in Manali and had not yet been contacted about the accident.

I was taken straight away to a hospital and Rodhan brought Dr. Rasik M. Bhansali, an Orthopaedic Surgeon, to examine me. This calm and cool surgeon leaned over me and said, 'First I'll examine your heart. How did you survive the pain for 8 days? Here a patient with a dislocated hip shouts at the smallest touch. And then I'll examine Dr. Shroff, he worried so much for you.'

I was kept in the hospital for a day. The plaster was to be kept for 6 weeks and I was allowed to go home. With me in the hospital room there were two other patients. One had broken a leg in a car accident at Bombay, while the other had broken his back falling on the bathroom floor. At least I had been out there of my own will and for my chosen sport.

Geeta arrived 3 days later. It was hardest for her to look after me and of course she was my constant support throughout the ordeal. Life was soon routine. First it was my 1½ year old son Sonam who objected. He would not come close to me and would shout from the balcony *chiu Baba la ghe* (sparrow, take away my father). He did not like a non-playing father who hogged all the attention. My story with a photo of Sonam and me appeared in the newspapers. My father-in-law never tired of showing Sonam in that photo to everyone, instead of me.

I was in great spirits—still. Putting a typewriter on my plaster I could finish all the post-expedition reports and accounts. We saw slides, discussed mountains and the days were hectic with many visitors. The reactions of people varied; elderly relatives sat grimly with the advice 'now never again' written on their faces. Some were with the 'I told you so' expression. Many came out of curiosity to know the story, which I repeated hundreds of times. But those friends who knew

me came with plans for the future, laughter and support. They knew that a dislocated hip would not keep me away from the mountains for long. Dr. Pravin Shah, a homeopath and a close friend, would come for lunch everyday and I would make preparations for his 'visit' with Indian classical music records and cassettes. We listened to a new raga everyday. Six weeks passed quickly and the day came when the plaster was to be opened. Little did I know that it would be a day of reckoning.

Dr. Bhansali looked at me with an expert eye. 'You have total avascular necrosis. I will not permit any weight-bearing for 2 years'.

'No problem doctor, I will not carry any weight. Someone else will carry my rucksack in the mountains', I replied rather naively.

'In medical terms this means that you will not put weight on your leg, be on crutches for 2 years. The hip-ball may disfigure or collapse even by the muscle weight. If that happens we will have to operate again and no more steady walking for you. You will limp'. This hit me like a bullet. Crippled at the age of 29 years! 'I will go to the mountains, even on crutches, if required', was my only thought.

Time passed and a deep depression and despair gathered. Friends rallied around, there were many whose support rose like a mountain. Dr. Shah started a long treatment with his homeopathic drugs. Physiotherapy and learning tricks on the crutches was the order of the day. The first check-up was due after three months. I sat tense as Dr. Bhansali examined the X-ray.

- 'It is a Himalayan wonder'. He was nodding his head. 'The joint has started recovering very well. This is rare. But still we will wait 2 years to give nature the full period to act'.

I was relieved, but then two years is a long period. I tried to be as normal as possible. Started going out for walks on crutches. Then came the treks on crutches on Sundays (totally 33) with climbing up to Matheran (767 m) as the height record. Twice I went to Pachmarhi in Central India, which was my annual outing. I had a scolding from Dr. Shroff when I planned to rappel on one leg!

As the summer approached, I was on my way to Sonmarg in Kashmir with Geeta and friends. We camped at the snout of the Thajiwas glacier and I climbed up on crutches to 5400 m. A hail-storm caught us and my crutches would slip on both sides. Help from a nearby army camp had to be called for to rescue me. The one-leg-dance-celebration on army rum is another story!

All along I kept up the physiotherapy, homeopathic drugs and

regular check-ups, which reflected in big grins from Dr. Bhansali everytime. I wrote *Trek the Sahyadris* (2nd edition) with Thrity Birdy giving all the editorial support. I learnt many wonderful lessons on the goodness of human nature. In local buses someone always immediately offered me a seat, or the Kashmiri shikarawala prayed a special namaz for my recovery. On a rainy day at Bombay's Marine Drive, literally a dozen cars stopped without my asking to offer me a lift, which otherwise is an impossibility. I continued walking in the rains, hikes and working. The strength and the spirit were winning.

It was in late January 1976 that the doctors finally cleared me to walk with a stick, instead of a crutch.

'Sir, don't let him do everything. You don't know what all he will do'. Dr. Shroff worriedly told Dr. Bhansali.

'Let him go to the mountains or do what he likes. This is as good as a new hip, a miracle. He can play football on the summit of Everest for all I care!' Dr. Bhansali was beaming with confidence. It was back to the old days and a new life for me. Still Dr. Shroff, care as he did, made me walk slowly with a stick for months till he was satisfied. It was only in early April that I was allowed to walk, run and be fully normal. Within a month, on 1st May 1976 to be exact, I was on my way to North Sikkim for a long Himalayan trek.

With just one companion, Zerksis Boga, I covered 240 km over 4 high passes in 30 days, covering almost 15,500 m up and down on that hip. Dr. Bhansali, Dr. Shah and Dr. Shroff refused to examine me upon my return. To them and the mountain spirit I owe a hip, which is still going strong.

Kumaon

*Later we know more, we understand more,
we may even come to love more; but the first
vision of a young man's love is surpassed by
no further splendour, and the first glory of a
mountain view never comes again.*

—Martin Conway

Chiring We is the only mountain which refused to yield to us on the first attempt. After a failure in 1977, I returned to it in 1979. And after our first ascent it has refused access to its summit to date. On its ice slopes was Zerksis Boga's finest hour. Our entire team consisted of friends from Bombay without any great climbing pretensions. If we had been caught in an avalanche on the Tharkot expedition in 1969, we had learnt the lessons as we negotiated the Kalabal-and icefall a decade later.

Darma valley introduced me to Muslim and Dhiren as it introduced them to the Himalaya. For many trips this partnership continued. The striking beauty of the valley, specially Anchri tal and the difficult crossing of Shin la could rarely be surpassed. A hard trek sometimes can offer much more beauty and challenge than an expedition.

After a decade I returned to Kumaon, to Panch Chuli, on a hard expedition. But that is another story.



9

Summer of '82

1982

*'A thousand, two thousand passes,
Passes in the lands of strangers,
I will cross three thousand passes,
To go to my own country.'*

—Bhotia Song

AS FAR AS one can remember people have travelled over mountain valleys, ranges and passes. They travelled for trade, for earning a livelihood or for communication. Today travel continues for defence reasons, government duties or in search of a livelihood. Some of us trek for pleasure, to seek beauty and glean knowledge of those ranges. Motives differ and that perhaps leads to a vast change of attitudes. For us each step is meant to discover beauty; for others it causes inevitable hardship.

The people of Darma, Byans and Chaudas (Kuthi-Kali) valleys have always been travellers. Every winter they still descend to the lower valleys. Formerly they had almost no connection with the plains of India. Their trade, community interaction and life style were all dominated by the people of Tibet, a region which extends towards their northern borders. To the south-southeast lies Nepal. Hence they had close links with both; in fact, they still own land in Nepal and till it. It is the British who penetrated these valleys. They named these people 'Bhotias', a term now commonly accepted for the inhabitants of these valleys or for all those who are Hindu in origin but follow Buddhist customs. The Kali valley attracted many visitors and was well-known. One of the pilgrim routes to Kailash-Manasarovar (over

the Lipu Lekh pass) leads through its fold. It is believed that in the Vedic era, sage Vyas stayed here; hence its name 'Byans'. There is a temple dedicated to him at Gunji. The lower valley 'Chaudas' is named either after four followers of the sage or it is so called because fourteen villages nestle there. Kali divides India and Nepal, forming a natural border.

The upper Kuthi valley borders Tibet to its east and north, while Darma lies to its west. The Darma valley is bifurcated into Lassar and Darma at the upper reaches. To its west lies 'Johar' or the Kalabaland-Munsiary area. All these valleys have many interconnecting passes which are still in use. All the valleys had connecting passes with Tibet leading to Gyanima Mandi or Taklakot and trade flourished on traditional lines. But this has stopped since the borders were closed in 1962. Some trade, illegal of course, still continues via Tinker la in Nepal.

The first thing that impresses a visitor about the Bhotias of these valleys is their appearance. A large population subsists as shepherds. Someone called it 'goat-culture'. But the other half, particularly the young, are seen in the latest brand of jeans and jackets. The educational level is high. They travel all over the country to earn a livelihood. Most of them take their surnames from the name of their village. The one who is from Dar is Daryal; from Garbyang, Garbyal and so on. So next time when you are in South India or in a big city look around for a Kutiyal or a Sonwal or even a Sipal. One is amazed to learn how far and wide the people of these valleys have travelled.

One of the interesting customs about which we had read was that of 'rang-bhang'.¹ On a particular day, the marriageable boys and girls of a village would come together and the festivities used to go on till most of them had found a suitable partner. Like many other things, this tradition, though it still exists, is now dying. These people have been the subject of a few anthropological and social studies because of their remoteness and unique customs.² They still present an interesting subject before civilization fully takes over.

These valleys are also lined with many high peaks, e.g., Panch Chulis, Chiring We, Sangthang. Naturally mountaineers were attracted to the region. Among the earliest visitors were geologists

1. *Through Valley of Gods* by M.M. Sharma.

2. *Social Economy of the Himalayas* by S.D. Pant, *Himalayan Travels* by Jodh Singh, *Himalayan Polyandry* by A.M. Mazumdar.

Prof. Arnold Heim and August Gansser. They explored the Kuthi and crossed Shin la to Darma in 1936. Cutting across to the west they crossed the Ralam pass.³ The Scottish Himalayan Expedition (1950), led by W. H. Murray, entered from the Ralam pass and attempted Panch Chuli from the Sona glacier.⁴ In 1950, Kenneth Snelson trekked extensively in the area. The party attempted Panch Chuli, crossed Gangchal Dhura and recorded their travels with a beautiful panorama.⁵ Among the recent visitors we can find reference to an attempt on Panch Chuli (in 1971) by a group led by Prof. C. K. Mitra.⁶ The uppermost Lassar, Darma and Kuthi valleys remained unrecorded for all these years.

This was the area that attracted us in the summer of 1982. We trekked up Darma, climbed around Meola glacier, crossed 2 passes, visited 3 valleys and camped near two exquisite lakes. It was a happy and enjoyable summer for us.

13 May. Dharchula was in darkness and wore a deserted look when we arrived there late in the evening. The 300 km bus journey from Kathgodam, Almora, Didihat, Jauljibi was tiring. Amidst the depressing surroundings we saw the smiling face of Sher Singh and two other porters, our old and trusted friends. Within a short while we were settled and even managed to contact the tehsildar (during an interval in the movie-theatre) to obtain his signature on our permits. Next morning we surveyed the scene. Opposite the Kali river lay another Dharchula with a Nepalese flag. A welcome lift by an army truck and we were at our road-head; Tawaghat (1000 m—16 km).

We must have been a curious sight as this area rarely receives visitors. Moreover we were a varied group in age, ('Age limit 18 to 66 years; membership restricted') and with a similar wide difference in experience. We prepared for the trek. Above Tawaghat, on the ridge, one notices a huge pillar. This pillar is said to contain inscriptions in Chinese. On this basis the entire Darma valley is claimed by China. Our trek, (initially with 8 porters), started on the 15th. In the first three days we were to reach Duktu, a fairly large village at the entrance of the Panch Chuli valley. The trek was easy, most enjoyable, and the route was sprinkled with empty villages. *Mawasas*

3. *The Throne of Gods* by Heim and Gansser.

4. *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition, 1952* by W.H. Murray and *Ultimate Mountains* by Thomas Weir. Also see *H.J.*, Vol. XVI, p. 53.

5. See *H.J.*, Vol. XVII, p. 97.

6. *H.M.I. Journal*, Vol. VI, p. 112.

were not moving up yet due to late winter. Nue (1700 m—16 km) was on a jeepable track; Sela (2500 m—17 km) was set amidst a most beautiful forest, while Duktu (3260 m—19 km) was situated with some unbelievable mountain scenery around. We stayed at dak bungalows, enjoyed easy gradients, admired unspoiled forests and crossed many snow-tongues. But the trek will be remembered for the waterfalls. There were plenty, of various shapes and heights. It was an unforgettable sight. Sometimes you'd see a silver trickle on the opposite bank and sometimes you'd pass underneath a huge down-pour. They always conducted their own symphony with beauty.

Duktu is at the centre of the valley with village Son adjoining and Dantu across the Sona nala. Across the Darma river nestle the villages of Baun and Philam. With the backdrop of Panch Chuli range it was a most impressive sight. No wonder our enthusiastic host at Dharchula was writing to the Government to develop Duktu as a 'Five-Star resort'! Here we re-packed and the party was divided for the next five days. Dhiren, Muslim and myself camped at the Panch Chuli base camp, while Jagdishbhai and Vasantbhai roamed in the villages and visited us for one night. Panch Chuli base camp was 6 km away at 3380 m. The route was easy and followed a good track till the junction of Meola and Sona glaciers. We were warned about a major difficulty on the way—a mad yak. The chowkidar very softly added that if the yak located us, we were sure to reach the base in record time! We did see this terror but we also seemed to hold some terror for the yak; later it chased our porters on a ferry, but it never bothered the Sahibs. Good manners!

The five days at the base were a delight. For the first two, we let loose on snow and ice and practised all possible crafts. It was hard work. One day we climbed to the base of Meola icefall to locate Camp 2 of W. H. Murray and see their route of 1950. Sona icefall was sending thundering avalanches down while Meola seemed to accept things quietly. The last day we decided to climb a small peak of 4330 m on the ridge descending from Panch Chuli V in the south. It had a wonderful panorama. Panch Chuli V (6437 m), IV (6334 m), III (6312 m) and the highest II (6904 m) formed a cirque above the Meola glacier. Panch Chuli I (6355 m) could not be seen. On the horizon above Sona glacier was Ngalaphu (6410 m). Many peaks lined the sky on all sides. A little rest, some food, getting lost on the rocks and we were back to the base. Camp was wound up and we rushed back to Duktu.

were not moving up yet due to late winter. Nue (1700 m—16 km) was on a jeepable track; Sela (2500 m—17 km) was set amidst a most beautiful forest, while Duktu (3260 m—19 km) was situated with some unbelievable mountain scenery around. We stayed at dak bungalows, enjoyed easy gradients, admired unspoiled forests and crossed many snow-tongues. But the trek will be remembered for the waterfalls. There were plenty, of various shapes and heights. It was an unforgettable sight. Sometimes you'd see a silver trickle on the opposite bank and sometimes you'd pass underneath a huge down-pour. They always conducted their own symphony with beauty.

Duktu is at the centre of the valley with village Son adjoining and Dantu across the Sona nala. Across the Darma river nestle the villages of Baun and Philam. With the backdrop of Panch Chuli range it was a most impressive sight. No wonder our enthusiastic host at Dharchula was writing to the Government to develop Duktu as a 'Five-Star resort'! Here we re-packed and the party was divided for the next five days. Dhiren, Muslim and myself camped at the Panch Chuli base camp, while Jagdishbhai and Vasantbhai roamed in the villages and visited us for one night. Panch Chuli base camp was 6 km away at 3380 m. The route was easy and followed a good track till the junction of Meola and Sona glaciers. We were warned about a major difficulty on the way—a mad yak. The chowkidar very softly added that if the yak located us, we were sure to reach the base in record time! We did see this terror but we also seemed to hold some terror for the yak; later it chased our porters on a ferry, but it never bothered the Sahibs. Good manners!

The five days at the base were a delight. For the first two, we let loose on snow and ice and practised all possible crafts. It was hard work. One day we climbed to the base of Meola icefall to locate Camp 2 of W. H. Murray and see their route of 1950. Sona icefall was sending thundering avalanches down while Meola seemed to accept things quietly. The last day we decided to climb a small peak of 4330 m on the ridge descending from Panch Chuli V in the south. It had a wonderful panorama. Panch Chuli V (6437 m), IV (6334 m), III (6312 m) and the highest II (6904 m) formed a cirque above the Meola glacier. Panch Chuli I (6355 m) could not be seen. On the horizon above Sona glacier was Ngalaphu (6410 m). Many peaks lined the sky on all sides. A little rest, some food, getting lost on the rocks and we were back to the base. Camp was wound up and we rushed back to Duktu.

The two seniors had a wonderful time there. All the villages were empty. There was only one chowkidar and a fierce dog. They visited the Panch Chuli temple and nearby villages. Vasantbhai, now 66 years old, is still young as ever. He regaled us with stories from his vast mountain experiences and poems from *Geetanjali*. Jagdishbhai, 53 years old, was back on a Himalayan trek after a 12-year gap. He was observing the surroundings with his usual meticulous care. We kept saying that the poor Himalaya were in trouble this year as the Honorary Secretary of 'The Himalayan Club' was on a personal inspection tour!

23 May. We shifted our camp to Sipu (4760 m—16 km). We walked along Darma. On the opposite bank the village of Go was peculiarly situated on a huge black-hole in the mountain side. Anyone would refuse to be invited for lunch there! At Tidang the valleys bifurcate. To the northeast was the main Darma valley while to the northwest was the Lassar Yankti valley. Lassar Yankti was like a dream girl with clear, turquoise-coloured water. Its banks were lined with multicoloured stones of various shapes and shades. Sipu was situated about 150 m above the river-bed. We camped on the school volley-ball ground. A few families had returned here. They were digging out their stock of potatoes stored for the winter. We had read a lot about the Sipals and it was fun to be here. One villager demanded dues not paid by a 'white-man's party' (Scotts' or Heim's). After promising to produce the note on the following day, he disappeared. Again good manners prevailed!

.Now we made ready to visit Ralam pass (5630 m) leading to Ralam village in the west. The Sipals were scared of this pass, particularly because it had lots of snow now. They advised us to prepare thoroughly. ('Even if you go for a shikar of a deer make preparations thorough enough to shoot a tiger'). On 25 May we left with our 3 permanent porters. We made our first mistake in map-reading here. We had to turn west on Nipchukang glacier. Jagdishbhai read the map (of 1954) correctly and followed the route marked and climbed up steeply to land in the shrubs on this abandoned track. Dhiren and I, following later, read the map incorrectly and almost missed the valley. We turned west at the river level. Lots of shouting and at last the first party descended on a giant snow-tongue. It was a delight to sleep under a boulder (how sadistic!) and watch both the elders descend with perfect balance adopting textbook techniques. We pushed in further and camped in a juniper clearing at 3910 m (10 km).

Three of us again pushed up to camp at 4450 m (6 km) following a moraine ridge. As the weather was none too good we only pushed the camp up to 4690 m (4 km) on the 27th. We were up at midnight and made tea, ready to leave for the pass. The approach was not too simple and a wind-slab slope was guarding it. The weather broke and we had to call it off. As we had a schedule to keep we could not spend three or four days waiting for the snow to settle down. So we retreated. Shikar on Ralam pass had ended!

29 May. The entire party started again towards the upper Lassar Yankti valley. We reached the main valley and proceeded literally on the river-bed. The map indicated a track upon the right bank: but taking advantage of the snow-bound river, we trekked up the river. A tired party camped at Kharsa (3750 m—10 km) in the evening.

30 May was our most tiring day. Three of us again started for Nassa (4270 m—10 km) in the uppermost Lassar Yankti valley. With heavy loads we crossed Jhutan glacier, descended to Ralphu and Anchri Tal, then across Ghutan and crossed Damolia glacier. All the crossings were very tiring and the final camp was a relief. And as if ordering a rest, heavy snowfall on the ensuing day did not allow us to move from the camp. Through the clearing we could see the great ablation valley leading to nowhere, and bordering Tibet. To the west there were many peaks but we were too close to the moraine walls to be able to see the summits.

1 June. We decided to return. We could start only in the afternoon at 3 p.m. It cleared by evening and we followed an easier lower route this time. By 5 p.m. we were at Anchri Tal (3660 m—4 km). Muslim was in a hurry to reach the camp at Kharsa. Dhiren and I just could not resist the temptation to stay at such a beautiful spot. For Dhiren (18 years) this was the first encounter with the Himalaya. His excitement about everything ('first time') was infectious. He had a habit of nicknaming everything. Potatoes were pats, tea was inty and theplas were theps. But the final touch was when Panch Chulis became Panchus and now we camped at Anchu!

But without exaggeration, Anchri had a Wordsworthian air about it. A small lake, very quiet and crystal-clear. The whole valley consisted of no other human beings. A reflection of the rising sun in the cold water. A small bird singing somewhere and our red tent in the background. We sat out around a fire till late at night and watched a glowing moon bestow unbelievable beauty on Anchri. I repeated Nandu Jayal's words to (his) my companion; '(John) D, in all this

beauty I guess God must be pretty close!''⁷

3 June. It was time for Jagdishbhai and Vasantbhai to leave us. Three of us moved to stay at Gangchal camping ground. Gangchal Dhura (5051 m) lies on the divide between the Lassar Yankti and Darma valleys. At this time of the year it was totally snow-bound. We had learnt that locally it is also called 'Baisakhiram Jot'. A popular I.T.B.P. Officer Baisakhiram, with a few others, was killed while crossing this pass a few years ago. Unlike the usual passes this one does not cross the ridge at a lowest point but at one of the high points. This leads a party to the death-trap in a deep gorge on both sides. This apparently alluring Dhura was dangerous ground.

4 June. By 6 a.m. we left under a bright and clear sky. The route climbed up steeply. Far too steeply to relax or enjoy the view. Soon grass gave way to rocks and we ran into hard snow, Dhiren kicked steps through a wide gully and we rested mid-way. Slowly a beautiful panorama unfolded itself. A quick tea and some food and we deliberately left that alluring lower gorge to climb a steep ridge full of scree. A soft-deep-snow-ground near the top thoroughly exhausted Muslim who was opening the route. At last at 3 p.m. we hit the high point. Traversing the ridge we reached the lowest point. This was Gangchal Dhura. Both sides were lined with the most famous series of mountains one can come across. It was like looking at a crowd of people. And still there were familiar figures among that crowd. Some were old friends with whom we had rubbed noses; Chiring We, Bamba Dhura or the recent Panch Chulis. There were many whom we had seen before: Suli Top, Rajrambha, Lalla We. And there were famous figures: Api, Nampa, Chaudhara. It was a most satisfying place to be in!

But perhaps every white cloud has a black lining! A threatening storm was evidently developing in the south and we had miles to go before a camp. I led the way down, avoiding those obvious traps and regularly sinking in to the hip. A tiring affair. We lost height fast. And when it seemed that the slopes would never end, we were on the bank of Darma river and camping little short of Dawe (4390 m—10 km) in the north. That was the signal for the storm to let loose on the area and we could not move from the tents on the following day.

Dawe is the last outpost on the Indian side. Two passes Nuwe

7. *Indian Mountaineer*, No. 8, p. 57.

Dhura (5645 m) and Lowe Dhura (5562 m) lead to Tibet (Gyanima Mandi) from here. The place is strategically important and a witness to the past glory of trade between India and Tibet. But the Darma valley, in marked contrast with the Lassar valley, is devoid of any vegetation. Even juniper shrubs are missing. The reason—defence forces. It was evident that many bushes were dragged out with their roots. An ecological disaster!

Whenever Muslim Contractor (23 years) was introduced to someone, you got a variety of reactions. 'You have a Hindu Contractor also on the trip?' or 'So what if he is Muslim?' He had trekked widely and now he decided to have a bath in the cold waters of Darma. He left a little ahead of us to investigate the crossing of a shaky snow-bridge. Unfortunately while he was about to go across, the bridge broke. He lost his ice-axe and got drenched. Bravely he descended into the chilled waters and searched for the ice-axe. All he managed was to shiver for the next hour. We walked along the true right bank for 4 km before wading the Darma through its cold waters.

We camped at Piungang (4270 m—8 km). Two porters were sent to go to bring up the cache of food we had left there. We had food with us but no fuel. For the next 1½ days we combed the area for little pieces of wood and managed to survive on half-cooked *shyakpa* and luke-warm tea. We would have paid anything for a litre of kerosene. Sher Singh arrived with that broad smile of his and things appeared better.

8 June. We reached Bidang. A huge camping ground is the place where Tibetan caravans used to camp. A large quantum of trade took place. Now an I.T.B.P. regiment is all that remains. But we had no grounds to complain as they treated us to a sumptuous lunch so welcome since our appetites had been whetted by the hunger of the last two days. We rose to the occasion. Dhiren had to leave us here. He left with a porter and that night he camped at Bauling. The next day he made it a long affair and reached Tawaghat, covering 72 km in two days. Then next day he joined Jagdishbhai at Pithoragadh. The night bus journey to Delhi was another story for them.

Our proposed route now was to cross Shin La (5496 m) in the east and reach Jolingkong lakes. Then follow Byans valley down. Inquiries at Bidang about the exact location of the pass were casually answered. We were told that *barats* (marriage procession) go over it in *chappals*. So we started in the late afternoon and camped 300 m above. Then next day we encountered cloudy weather. Not to miss the view we did

not proceed to the pass but shifted the camp another 150 m. There were 3 gullies to our east. No apparent route appeared. Everything was snow-bound and that changed the situation.

10 June. Starting early we entered the second gully. It was rising steeply with crusts of ice and rocks. We reached the base of a 600 m high wall with a wide ramp at its base. The route passed on that ramp. It was a virtual death-trap with stone-falls due to the melting of snow. We branched off on a steep rocky wall a little away from this wall. Mixed ground with ice-rock-scrree and snow had to be negotiated. A terrible nerve-taxing wet climb! On the top another high rock-wall guarded the route, discharging stones. We traversed loose snow and reached a clearing. A tired party started and ten steps ahead we saw those welcome cairns 15 m below us. We were at Shin la at 3 p.m. after an eight-hour climb. Some pass, we thought, for a *barat* in *chappals*! The view to the east was dominated by Sangthang (6480 m), the black rocks of Kunti valley and Tibet. We descended again through the terrible hip-deep snow and later on a moraine ridge. A 6322 m peak adjoining Shin la looked an exact replica of the famous Kailash. It is locally worshipped as 'Baba Kailash'. In the fading light we climbed up 3 moraine ridges and 100 m to camp at Jolingkong lake (4630 m—10 km).

11 June was the rest day. We surveyed the surroundings. The lake was about 5 km in circumference and still frozen. A small temple and little cairns separated it from the roaring Kunti river. Jolingkong is also worshipped as 'Chhota Manasarovar'. We had heard about a pair of 'Rajhans' that lived here. But we had also heard that no one can shoot them because the bullets went 'cold' while shooting across the icy lake. But the very thought of shooting was disturbing. The valley up takes a peculiar S turn to Wilsha. Two passes, Lampiya Dhura (5547 m) and Mangsha Dhura (5486 m) leading to Tibet are a little ahead. A large moraine bed in the Kuthi river was a reminder of a gigantic lake that had once formed. We could not determine when the natural dam had burst.

12 June. This was a day to remember. As we left the lake there was a climb to a prominent ridge in the south. Walking leisurely we observed three figures on that ridge. We continued and coming a little closer were astonished to find the three jawans aiming their Light Machine Guns at us! We waved and that led to a scramble among them to bunkers with L.M.Gs. still pointed at us. We were worried. Never trust a Khaki brain, particularly as they had no live shooting

practice since 1962! Hiding behind a huge rock unashamedly, we let Sher Singh go ahead as he looked the most 'Indian' among us. We were waved up soon. The Officer talked to us but still a dumb-looking jawan kept pointing a gun at us. At last things were sorted out. The dumb jawan very reluctantly unloaded. He was distinctly unhappy. For already he had visions of medals for capturing three Chinese! They had just arrived and they thought we had crossed the Tibetan pass. Shin la is not open till late in the year. Credentials were established. They withdrew an alarm sent down the lines in the valley. But all along our trek down we encountered curious glances and had a story to tell.

By evening we were at Kuthi village (3760 m—14 km) which has the most exquisite wood-carved houses. As we were seen off by a local officer, he pointed to a small hill at the outskirts, with ruins 5 ft high. This was Pandu Killa where the Pandavas stayed. According to the legend a 9-storeyed building on that hill was their home. With a mischievous chuckle he added, 'Since we have come it has always appeared a little smaller!' In the evening we camped at Nihal and on the next day we crossed Gunji.

At Gunji, the Kuthi river merges with Kali which forms the Indo-Nepal border. As the legend goes, it is the Britishers who interchanged the names of the white Kali and the blackish Kuthi rivers. This ensured a vast area of land as British territory since Kali was accepted as a border. They built a temple dedicated to Kali near Lipu Lekh pass to authenticate the name. A good example of British diplomacy! An old man advised us now to follow *kachhuve-ki-chaal* ('tortoise walk') for the route down the valley involved many ups and was rather tiresome. Here we joined the Kailash-Manasarovar pilgrim route from Lipu Lekh pass well described by pilgrims to Manasarovar.⁸ We were to suffer that 'curse of Kali'. Because of the narrow gorges it forms, the route climbs up thousands of feet a few times and finally descends at Tawaghat. At certain places the track was wide enough to be motorable. In 1960, a contract was made to build the road from Almora to Lipu Lekh pass to facilitate pilgrim traffic. The contractor was persuaded by the Chinese to start the construction from the pass to Almora. This would allow a good deal of strategic advantage to the Chinese to descend to lower valleys. The folly of this plan was discovered. The road has not reached Tawaghat yet.

8. See *H.J.*, Vol. 38, p. 7.

15 June. In three days we reached Narayan Ashram, 2775 m via Garhyang (9 km), Malipa (16 km), Jipti (11 km), Ashram (16 km). The place appears like a building in fantasy land. The location, the construction and the atmosphere it generates is most conducive to spiritual practice. The ashram was built by Narayan Swami in 1946 to help the pilgrims to Manasarovar. With Api-Nampa in the southeast and Panch Chulis in the northwest it is a place of rare beauty. A day of rest and we descended 1645 m to reach Tawaghat. Back to the heat and to civilization.

We now jostled in buses, ate at *dhabas* and sped home by trains. All that had gone past was already beckoning us. We had finished our travel. But it will be impossible to forget the Panchus, goat-culture, L.M.G., Kutiyals, passes and of course Anchu!

10

Mountain of Long Life

First Ascent of Chiring We

1979

CHIRING WE is a shy mountain. It remained unheard of till recently and refused to allow itself to be seen by human eyes at close quarters. Situated in a remote corner of the Kumaon Himalaya on the border of Tibet, it remained aloof and evaded any contact with mountaineers. It was beyond the purview of the local people with this Bhotia name. We had to cross a treacherous icefall to have a first glimpse of it. But then, at that point, it shed all its shyness and rose nakedly 1500 m in front of us, presenting boldly its southwest face. It added the tests of crevasses, strong Tibetan winds, sharp ridges and giant cornices. We climbed three of its surrounding peaks to be ready to approach it. And at last, this 'Mountain of Long Life', yielded to our persuasion and perseverance, to allow us the first ascent.

Situated at the head of the Kalabaland glacier, it is in great company. On the west is the Milam glacier with Hardeol, Tirsuli and the eastern wall of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. On the north is Tibet with numerous peaks, while the east (across the Darma valley) is dominated by the Api and Nampa group of peaks of West Nepal. The south is closed off with Chaudhara, Rajrambha and Panch Chuli. The glacier itself is 15 km in length, running NW to SE. It joins the Yankchar glacier and both together form the Shankalpa glacier, which is also a rare phenomenon. Administratively, it is in the Musiary division of the Pithoragadh district of U.P.

The area had no colourful past. In the *Himalayan Journal* it has received mention only once, by Kenneth Snelson.¹ The Scottish Hima-

1. See panorama, *H.J.*, Vol. XVIII, p 99

layan Expedition acknowledged its existence while crossing the Ralam pass in 1952. Then in 1967, a small group from Delhi visited the glacier but their activities are not recorded. After ten years, in May 1977, we organized an expedition to the glacier, but being knotted in our own logistics, failed to get near it.² A peak of 5600 m on the shoulder of Suli Top was all that we could climb. In October, the same year, a team from Calcutta penetrated the icefall and at the third attempt climbed Bamba Dhura, via the south ridge. In October 1978, another group from Calcutta climbed one of the peaks during a scientific exploratory trip. Equipped with our familiarity of the area and information from the above expeditions, we were back again in May-June 1979 to resume our challenge to this highest virgin of Kumaon.

Sherpas say that a mountain selects its own climbers. Our team was a natural choice of close friends and climbing companions of past years. A typewriter is as important to a mountaineer as an ice-axe, wrote Tilman.³ We did not forget his words. We found thorough planning as interesting and essential as climbing techniques. On a number of occasions, it was our saviour, though it did provoke a comment from one of the members: 'If we have any time left after filling up all the files, we may climb one of the peaks.'

In the fields particularly, we had new approaches, a sort of Indianization. A Hindu calendar is based on the phases of the moon, which are closely related to the weather. During the years of climbing, we found the people in the hills and Sherpas strictly following it in their day-to-day life. And as a hypothesis, we always noticed a pattern in the weather which corresponded to this calendar. This was particularly true during the years when a 'leap month' was added, to correct the calendar according to the seasons. It was noticed that it might not necessarily be clear till the third week of June or stop raining after mid-September; but the weather did coincide with this calendar. We were helped by this theory at the planning stage and our high-altitude days were deliberately made to coincide with the expected clear weather in the first fortnight of the months of Jyestha when the moon was waxing. This worked out well as in the previous years, but one still cannot vouch for the general accuracy of the procedure. Local storms may vary and our observations relate to Garhwal only.

2. *HJ.*, Vol. XXXV, p. 221.

3. *Nanda Devi* by H.W. Tilman.

On the food front, we improvised many home-made fresh foods, to which we were more used. These were carefully packed; and once above Munsiairy it was almost like a 'natural refrigerator' and they kept well. For example, instead of cheese, we preferred equally nutritious home-made sweets. We found eating according to our natural habits very palatable and none of us lost any weight or felt the altitude. And it reduced costs to a great extent too. Only the cook was kept very busy!

5 May 1979 and we were off with 3000 kg of luggage to Kathgodam. Changing to a bus, we reached Munsiairy, facing the five peaks of Panch Chulis. With load-carrying goats and 23 porters, the first party started for Ralam (3650 m) four days away via Lila, Pilthi and Sapo. Three members stayed behind to arrange for the rest of the 27 porters, and followed after three days. But then on, the adventure began in right earnest. On the 14th, the porters did not reach the proposed base camp site, but dumped us at 4050 m in the middle of the moraine on the Shankalpa glacier. By evening, a steady snowfall started which continued for 24 hours and even at our altitude left an unusual amount of snow. The goats were following a day behind; they refused to go further, and dumped loads at Ralam. The second team joined us on the 16th, but all except our 6 porters left for home in face of the inclement weather. The situation was gloomy. There we were with a 2000 kg load and still a day away from the base. Any thoughts of Chiring We sounded downright remote.

But it was in this situation that the team rose to the occasion. One porter was sent down to recruit a few more, and with the available manpower we started ferrying loads, which was to continue for five stages to Camp 3. Even Dr. Vasant Desai, at the age of 62, climbed up to Camp 1 with the usual loads and we said to ourselves that now, with his spirit at this age, we have no business to fail. Rodhan, Raj and I occupied the base camp on the 17th, to open the route and ferry to the advance base camp at 4540 m. Snow conditions were atrocious, to say the least, an A.B.C. was placed at the foot of Suli Top, on the Kalabaland glacier.

At 4.30 a.m. on 21 May, we were rudely awakened by a strong tremor. It was an earthquake. As we learned later from the radio broadcast, the epicentre was our area. At the base camp, to our horror, we felt the moraine floor shaking. A few crevasses widened and there was a heavy discharge of stones from the nearby walls. It was rather frightful, feeling the mighty Himalaya in action. Those at Ralam were

sleeping in a dilapidated school. They ran out, since it had a roof of loose stones. Luckily nobody was hurt, but this earthquake at high altitude was a real shaking experience. We consolidated A.B.C. for three days and the situation improved with five porters joining us. Boga, Nayan, Raj and I forged ahead with Sherpas to A.B.C. and Camp 1 (4940 m) at the foot of the icefall, climbing steadily over the knee-deep snow of the glacier. But as we slept in our tents at A.B.C. on the night of 24 May, a strong blizzard struck our area. Winds with a velocity of about 100 km drove powder snow on to our tents. We were confined to the tents for 40 hours. When we emerged, three feet of snow lay all round. But the weather had cleared and it was to remain clear for the next 15 days. Boga, Nayan, Tashi and Kami started opening the route in the icefall, while we ferried loads to Camp 1.

The icefall was a place of wonders. It had everything, giant crevasses, ice-pinnacles and ice-walls. The route at first cut across to the west, towards Burphu Dhura. Then for 100 m it passed under overhanging ice-walls where everybody had to run across. A very breathless affair! Then bypassing a huge ice wall on the east, it followed a prominent gully again to reach the westernmost point, Camp 2 at 5300 m. It was a great experience to go over the route and none of us will forget it easily. After improving the route, on 2 June we pushed through a ferry of 10 persons to Camp 2 and this solved all our supply problems for the next few days. But think of it, we had as yet not even seen the mountain we wanted to climb!

But it was not far from us now. On 4 June, Boga, Nayan, Tashi and Kami occupied Camp 3 at 5790 m about half a kilometre in the south, from the wall of the Bamba Dhura. The route first climbed over a huge plain up to a prominent projection, 'Elephant's Head'. Onwards, it passed on the true left over many crevasses and ice-bridges to climb to the top of the head. A few more nasty crevasses and we reached the camp. All along the route, we could see Chiring We. The first sight was staggering. The southwest face rose 1500 m with shining ice. Giant cornices clung to this face. The west ridge was at least 60° steep with a narrow curve, descending to the glacier. On the north, giant cornices were hanging all along. The south was joined to two smaller peaks. But anyway, it was Hobson's choice to us, and the west ridge was the only possibility. Now we were ready for our skirmish, but a lot was to follow.

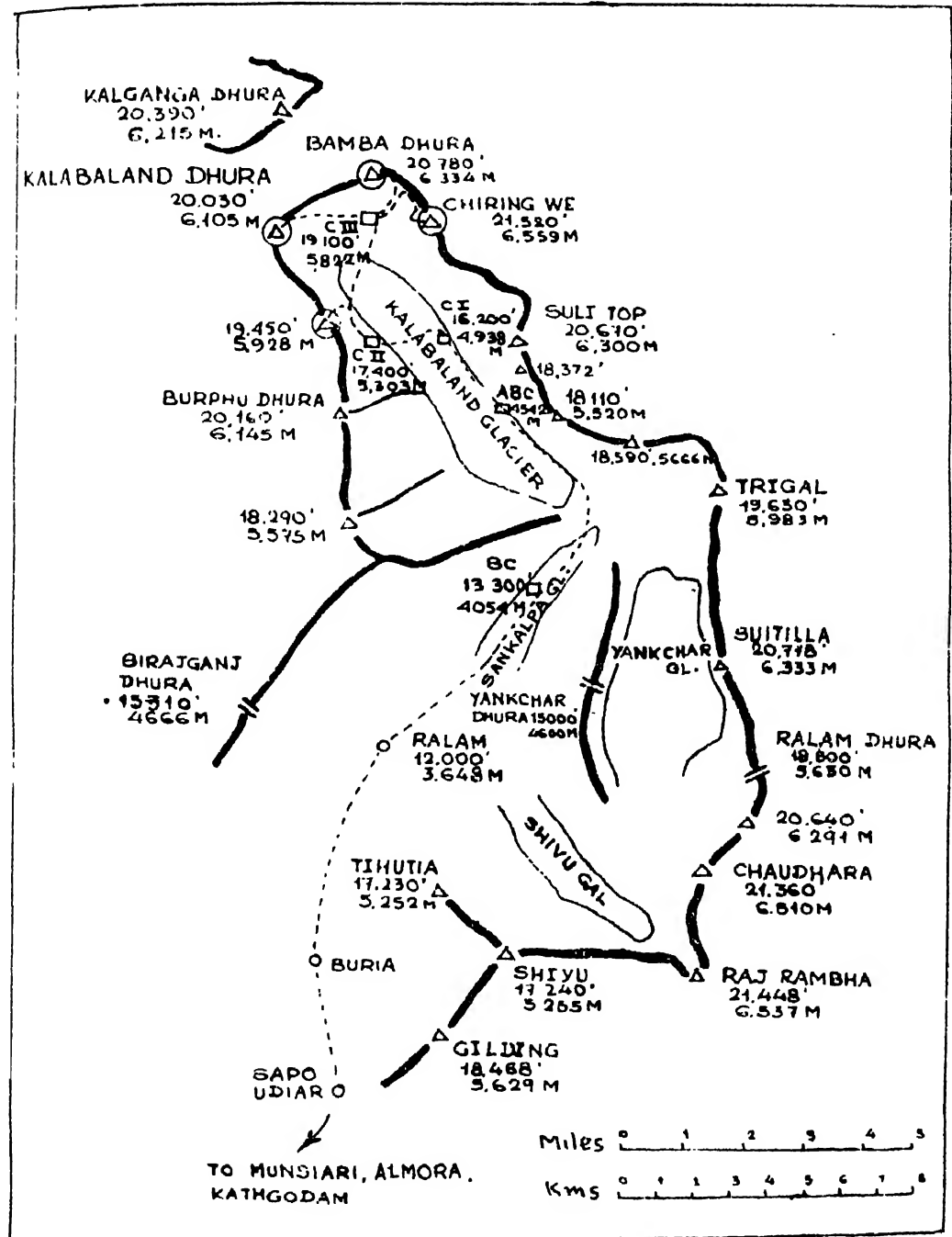
Bamba Dhura (6334 m)

I was feeling a bit off-colour as we left Camp 2 on 5 June. Vijay shared some of my load. As we were on the top of the 'Elephant's Head', we could see climbers returning to Camp 3 above. A little ahead, we could hear the sounds of jubilation, and I started running. They had climbed Bamba Dhura! Tashi, Boga, Nayan and Kami left the camp at 5 a.m. on two ropes. Moving due east, they opened a route over a ramp again over crevasses. An ice-wall was climbed to reach the col at 6120 m between Bamba Dhura and Chiring We. On the plateau they traversed to the SE ridge and soon hit hard ice, and a steep angle. Here, Nayan discovered that his crampons were missing and this was to cost him the summit climb. After about 150 m the angle became gradual and, avoiding cornices on the north, Boga and Tashi reached the summit at 11 a.m. They had perfect weather conditions for grand views and studying Chiring We, now in the south. It was the second ascent of this peak.

Kalabaland Dhura (6105 m)

As one turns to the Kalabaland glacier, a shapely peak in the form of a triangle is visible at the head of the glacier. This peak, marked 6105 m, guards the western edge of the icefall and unlike Chiring We, it is a prominent landmark all along. Now from Camp 3 it was approachable.

On 6 June, again at 5 a.m., the camp hummed with activity as Lakhpa, Vijay and I left for this peak. As our camp was situated with Chiring We in mind, we had to traverse about 2 km to reach the base. A seemingly gentle slope suddenly steepened to 60° but with soft snow which allowed steps to be kicked. Apart from a giant bergschrund, it was strenuous but not difficult. We reached a col in the north, 100 m below the peak. It was like paradise gained. We were face to face with Nanda Devi and the peaks on the eastern walls of the sanctuary from Maiktoli to Rishi Pahar, Hardeol, Tirsuli, Dunagiri and Kamet peeped from behind. On the north, Uja Tirthhe, Lampak and Kalganga Dhura were seen. On the east, Chiring We rose high. It was a rather sobering thought that in the next few days we would be attempting it. As clouds were rolling in, we started putting on crampons, as ahead was a steep ice-gully leading to the high corniced summit. After some struggle Vijay declared that the crampons didn't fit him. As he was approaching his first twenty-thousander, I offered



Kalabaland glacier.

him my pair. Leaving me anchored in the company of mountains, Lakhpa and Vijay climbed slowly to the top. Steps were cut all along with strong belays. The summit was reached at 10 a.m. and Vijay climbed down in half an hour. I gleefully accepted his suggestion to climb up on the safe route and was up at the top in no time. As it looked down to the Milam valley, the summit was not a place to linger around. We rushed back to the col and were back to the tents by 3 p.m.

Continuing the pattern, again at 5 a.m. of 7 June, Tashi, Kami and Boga left for the first attempt on Chiring We. We could see them on a ramp by 8 a.m. making brisk progress. By 9 a.m. they were stopped by a giant bergschrund and the three dots stopped moving. After two hours of fixing ropes, the steepness and exposure defeated them and they withdrew. Back at the camp, Chewang Tashi opined that Chiring We appeared 'impossible' to him and we should withdraw. The peak was difficult and dangerous in his view. He was a climbing instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, and had to his credit the first ascent of Changabang in 1974. We considered his opinion but then we had also rubbed our noses against the mountain and after a thorough observation, it was felt that we might lose a battle but the war could be won. As Tashi was firm in his pessimism, we parted company and accordingly on 8 June he left the mountain which ironically we were to climb in the next two days.

Unnamed Peak (5989 m)

Strong winds were lashing at the tent walls and none of us could move out on 9 June. Two porters arrived at Camp 3 by the afternoon, with a note. Deciding on the spur of the moment, Raj and Kali were attempting this gentle peak, a little above our well-trodden route above Camp 2. Waiting for some time below, they had perhaps lost patience and considering that they had no experience, we were worried for their safety. Luckily we were not at grips with Chiring We as scheduled; otherwise, we would have been stretched at both ends. Leaving Camp 2 early, they reached the base of the peak to follow the eastern and southeastern approaches. It was a long trudge to the top, facing strong winds. This was the third ascent of the peak, situated about a kilometre south of Kalabaland Dhura. After good views, they returned to the camp exhausted, but proving the maxim that all is well that ends well.

Chiring We (6559 m)

10 June, and the support team of Kanu and myself were up by 1 a.m. It was a beautiful moonlit night and extremely cold at -20°C , but luckily, the wind was low. The summiters were ready to leave by 4 a.m. after breakfast, and we were again cosy in our sleeping-bags.

Boga, Lakhpa, Nayan and Kami left on two ropes, heavily loaded with fixed ropes and a variety of pitons. The going was good, as they reached the col. Later, Boga vividly described that the pleasure of a full moon setting on Nanda Devi was so satisfying that he wouldn't have thought twice if they had to return at that moment. But the hard work remained. Sunlight touched them on the ramp at the base of the north face of Chiring We. After some rest they climbed up to the fixed ropes left on 7 June. Very gradually they crossed the bergschrund and going over umpteen crevasses they hit the west ridge at about 8.30 a.m. On the other side was the southwest face with a drop of 1500 m to the glacier, and the ridge rose at an angle of 60° to 70° and had four giant cornices hanging on the north. Thus all along they had to stick to a narrow path between the drop and the cornices: Reluctant to take any chances they fixed ropes all the way to the summit 460 m above them. Naturally the progress was slow and about 240 m below the summit, Nayan and Kami sat down while Boga and Lakhpa, who were faster, pushed ahead. Cutting steps and with fixed ropes, they were on the top of the highest virgin peak of Kumaon exactly at 12.10 p.m. At Camp 3, Kanu could film the entire ascent and we embraced each other in joy and relief. But the celebrations were still to come. We filled thermos flasks with hot liquids, and loaded with food, started climbing towards the col at 6120 m.

The summit, as always, was a wonderful place. They had a look around numerous peaks far and near. A staggering view was looking down towards the icefall. And of course, the grand view of the great Tibetan plateau to the north. In the east, Api and Nampa and in the west Nanda Devi, were the only peaks above them. Like all good things, it was too good to last and they had to leave quickly. By 1.30 p.m. they met the second team. Nayan and Kami followed the steps and the fixed ropes to reach the summit at 2.30 p.m. They all descended together towards the col.

At the col, we could see them coming down. They all looked like ghosts and collapsed above a crevasse. We climbed up further, and with hot drinks and food they revived quickly. We reached the camp at 7 p.m. exactly 15 hours after they had left.

On 11 June, we wound up Camp 3 and slowly climbed down to the 'Elephant's Head'. We had a last look at 'our' Chiring We. It was standing with the same arrogance. 'A mountain never lowers itself, we have to rise to climb it,' says a hill proverb. We looked down to see the three sturdy figures of our Kumaon porters climbing steadily upwards, and we knew that it was time to return home.

11

The Sunderdhunga-Tharkot Expedition

1969

THE YEARLY itch for the mountains started troubling us as early as January and we willingly succumbed to it. Selecting the team was no problem as we decided to have a small group of friends to enjoy a good climbing holiday in the Himalaya. Our team consisted of Zafar Vasi, Zerxis Boga, Bharat Merchant, Manu Dattani and myself as leader. Though we were a very young team, all of us being under 24 years in age, we had a good amount of training and experience in Himalayan climbing to support our plans.

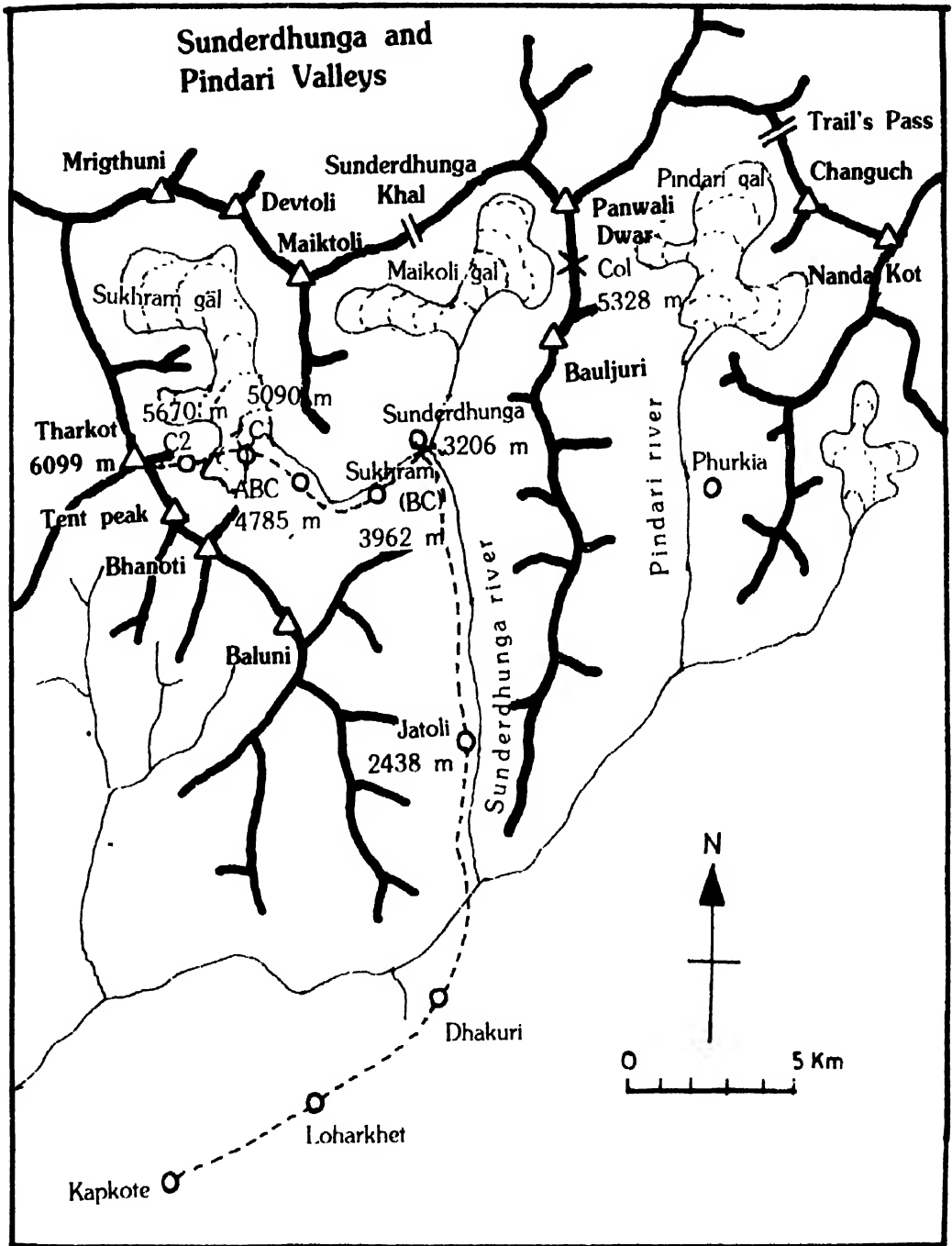
To the west of the Pindari glacier and under the high Sunderdhunga Khal lies the Sunderdhunga valley. It is situated in an enchanting cirque of mountains dominated by the gigantic Maiktoli wall on the one side and the gentle Tharkot range on the other. Within its deep and narrow gorges, thick forests, lush green meadows, abundant wild life and the snow-capped mountains, the valley offers all its name stands for—beauty in all its forms. It first came to be known when Shipton and Tilman made their exit from the Nanda Devi Sanctuary by climbing down from the Sunderdhunga khal to this valley. Wilfrid Noyce visited Sunderdhunga in 1944 making the first ascent of Tharkot and Baljauri peaks. The first and only Indian ascent of Tharkot was by K.P. Sharma's team in 1963. Apart from this the valley has not been disturbed frequently. With its short approach-march and good climbing-propositions, it suited us ideally. Our plans were to climb Tharkot (6099 m) and to attempt to cross the col (5330 m) between Panwali Dwar and Baljauri peaks connecting the Maiktoli glacier to Pindari glacier.

After hectic preparations finally we set off for the hills on 11 May. Our Sherpas Dawa Ringzing and Wangchuk met us at Kapkote, our road head. After the usual bargaining with the porters, we started along the route to Pindari glacier. Crossing the Dhakuri khal the route led down to a small bridge over the confluence of the Pindari and Sunderdhunga rivers. Here we entered the Sunderdhunga valley. Jatoli, the only village in the valley at 2440 m and housing very hospitable people, was our first halt. Some of the elders still remember the visit of Shipton and Tilman and the rope they left as a souvenir. Walking along the river, the track climbed up and down to reach Sunderdhunga (3200 m). It is an open grazing ground with mountains on all sides except the south.

To get to the base camp at Sukhram from Sunderdhunga one can either walk along the river or climb a steep ridge and then traverse the entire slope. We selected the latter course, for the former route involves danger of rockfalls. Though this involved nearly 450 m of climbing, the effort was rewarding. From the top we had a most gorgeous view of the Panwali Dwar, Baljauri, Maiktoli and the Tharkot range. Cutting our way through rhododendrons and steep snowy slopes, we reached the base camp at Sukhram (3960 m) and camped underneath a huge rock.

Sun up and we were off to Camp 1, which by my reckoning was 760 m above us. We were at the beginning of the Tharkot range and so before we could hope to reach the slope of Tharkot, we had to traverse the range entirely, for Tharkot is right at the far end. In fact, the peculiar thing about this mountain is that all along you are only approaching it and except for the last 300 m or so you are never on its slopes at all. The route to Camp 1 was far from difficult, but because the snow was soft and deep it became an exhausting affair. The route involved a very steep climb traversing the long arms of the mountains of the Tharkot range coming down to the Sukhram glacier. By 10 o'clock the clouds had engulfed us and it became suddenly very cold and started snowing. We pressed on but by 11 a.m. the visibility became very poor and it looked as though the clouds would never lift. So it was decided to dump the loads where we were and return. This was our advance base at 4785 m.

We came up the next morning by 9 a.m. and went ahead to find a camp site for Camp 1. After crossing a huge snowfield, we climbed up a rotten-looking rock patch of about 30 m. There the route lay through a giant ice-lip nearly 60 m high and 90 m broad but the route was



quite safe. On top of it we dumped the loads. It was 2.30 p.m.

On 25 May we rose to a cloudless sky. By 11 a.m. we reached the point where we had dumped the loads the day before. After a snack we did a steep climb for about 30 m and reached a vast snow-plateau. Crossing the plateau we began climbing yet another steep couloir of 45 m. Camp 1 was on the top of it at 5090 m. The view around us was stupendous. In front lay Tharkot. Around, we had a panoramic view of the gigantic Maiktoli wall, the Panwali Dwar with its ice-fluted walls rising above the upper *névé* of the Maiktoli glacier, the gentle Bal-jauri, the famous Nanda Kot and far in the distance the mountains of Eastern Kumaon and Nepal.

From Camp 1 the slopes became more and more treacherous and the terrain more and more tricky. We decided to rope up. To avoid the main icefall leading up to Camp 2, we took the route under the ridge coming from the adjoining Tent peak. Carrying heavy loads and sinking hip-deep in snow, we climbed zigzag towards the Tent peak for about 300 m before traversing under a rock slope towards Tharkot. After crossing a small icefall we rested on a small plateau. The route ahead traversed under a prominent black patch of rock towards the east ridge of the Tent peak. Making our way through a maze of *séracs*, we ultimately reached a small depression directly below the Tent peak. This was our Camp 2 (5670 m) in line with the top of the lower rock face of Tharkot. It started snowing by the time we pitched our tents. Life seemed pleasant after a cup of coffee, for we were badly dehydrated. None of us slept well, for half the time we had to kick the flaps to keep the snow from building up on our tents.

By 4 a.m. we were out of our sleeping-bags hoping to make an early start. Unfortunately, we had soon to return to our sleeping-bags, for the weather was very bad. It was 2 o'clock in the afternoon before the weather improved a little to enable us to see for 100 m or so. Three of us set off immediately to make a route ahead. It was a steep slope of 200 m on to a plateau whence the pyramid of Tharkot rises. The track climbed up the slope which at its top was flanked by a giant *sérac* on either side. The *sérac* appeared absolutely harmless. Having reached the plateau, we crossed and reached the base of the pyramid. A long bergschrund extended in a semicircle from the Tent peak to the place where we now stood. We were in line with the col between the Tent peak and Tharkot. From that I estimated our height to be 5940 m. From here a steep climb led to the east ridge of Tharkot, which was rising gently to the summit dome. The summit appeared

quite near and well within our reach as there was no technical difficulty on the way. The weather took a turn for the worse and we had to return, hoping to make an early attempt the next day in good weather. On our return we were treated to a fantastic view of Panwali Dwar and Maiktoli aglow with the evening red, rising high above the clouds.

It was 5.30 a.m. on 28 May. We were full of enthusiasm and our thoughts turned to the summit. I decided to keep Dattani at the camp as he was not feeling too well. We followed the track made the day before. We were five on a rope led by Sherpa Dawa, Bharat, Boga, myself and Sherpa Wangchuk. We had walked for about 10 minutes and were suddenly startled by a curious sound loud and violent. Though we had never heard such a sound before, we instinctively knew that it was the sound of an avalanche. The sérac above us, about 30 m tall and 180 m above us, had cracked into several blocks and these were tumbling down. It did not give us any time at all and within seconds we were in the avalanche and there was no way out of it. We could offer no resistance at all as the ground slipped from under our feet and we were in mid-air. We rolled and tumbled unconscious of everything else. I felt very breathless and the swimming motions, which I did vigorously, helped a little.

After a minute or two—which actually seemed an eternity to us—it was all over. We had fallen about 150 m. We were all buried in the debris of snow. Luckily, none of us were buried too deeply. Sherpa Wangchuk was free and came to help us, with blood running down his cheek. He pulled out Boga who was covered with blood and groaning with pain. Then with his bare hands he dug Dawa out. Soon both of them relieved Bharat. I was buried up to my neck and finding it increasingly difficult to breathe, I struggled helplessly shouting for help. To see three of them coming to my rescue was also a great relief. After some hard digging with hands they hauled me out by my arm-pits, all entangled in ropes. They tried to find a knife, but there was none; crampons and teeth were of no use. Suddenly Wangchuk had a brainwave. He broke his Thermos flask and used its glass to cut the rope. The idea worked and I was freed from my misery. We quickly dragged ourselves from the line of the avalanche and then had a quick personal check-up. Luckily, no bones were broken but some of us were bleeding profusely. Boga was quite bad with his upper eyelid badly cut and his face bleeding all over. Dawa had a swelling on his knees and I had bad cuts on my left thigh. But we were all in a

position to walk or drag ourselves. It was 6.30 a.m. We had suffered the agony for 40 minutes and in the process had lost everything: sunglasses, gloves, ice-axes, rope and even our two cameras were consumed by the white fury. We worked by instinct, all that mattered was life and survival.

Since the avalanche had come diagonally, it had thrown us off the track between Camps 1 and 2. Now we found ourselves in the middle of the icefall we had deliberately avoided while coming up. With Wangchuk in the lead we decided to make a dash for the base camp. Walking was painful. Tumbling under many a fearsome *sérac* we reached Camp 1 almost snow-blind due to walking without sunglasses. Soon the weather worsened and we were spared this experience. As Boga was finding it difficult to walk, I decided to stay with him while the others rushed down to send up porters. It was a long day for us since then. We dragged ourselves slowly, walking at the most 20 steps at a time. Soon Boga's condition worsened and he collapsed. We sat on a rock patch waiting for the rescue, Boga was putting up a brave fight. Later on we found out that he had cracked two ribs and had injured his skull. After about three hours of waiting the porters came up and we started our painful walk again on their shoulders. At last after 10 hours we were at the base camp, nursing each other's wounds. We had to spend the night around a fire as all our belongings were at Camp 2 and in spite of taking sleeping pills we remained awake feeling the pain and cold.

At Camp 2 Dattani lived through a different experience. He was waving good-bye to us when the avalanche swept us away. He was too dazed to do anything. Gripped by fear and bad weather he decided to stay where he was. In the night, alone at 5670 m he started getting hallucinations, heard our voices and even found himself in conversation with us. Believing us as lost, he collected our personal belongings with a hope of restoring them to our families. According to him the blocks of *séracs* were so big that even if one of them had hit us we would have been crushed.

Next day at the crack of the dawn he moved down. Losing his way often, ultimately he met the porters sent up by us to fetch him. They informed him that all of us were safe. He almost ran to the base camp to make himself doubly sure. Our reunion was very warm.

Now all the members were at the base camp but the equipment was still at Camp 2. Since Boga's condition was serious, I decided to move down. Moreover, due to the injuries and the continuing bad

weather any further attempt on Tharkot or the col would not be possible. On the 30th we were all at Sunderdhunga. Zafar, who had gone on a reconnaissance trip towards Maiktoli glacier, met us here. At first our porters were too frightened to go up to fetch the equipment. We offered some rice and money to the local priest who made the route safe by some wild gestures and prayers. Our porters, Shamsing and Devni, made their fourth trip to Camp 2 to fetch the equipment. Walking back was particularly painful for Boga and Dawa and they would take almost a whole day to cover a short march. We all assembled at Jatoli, with our equipment on 2 June. The next day we began our plod down to Kapkote.

Nepal-Sikkim

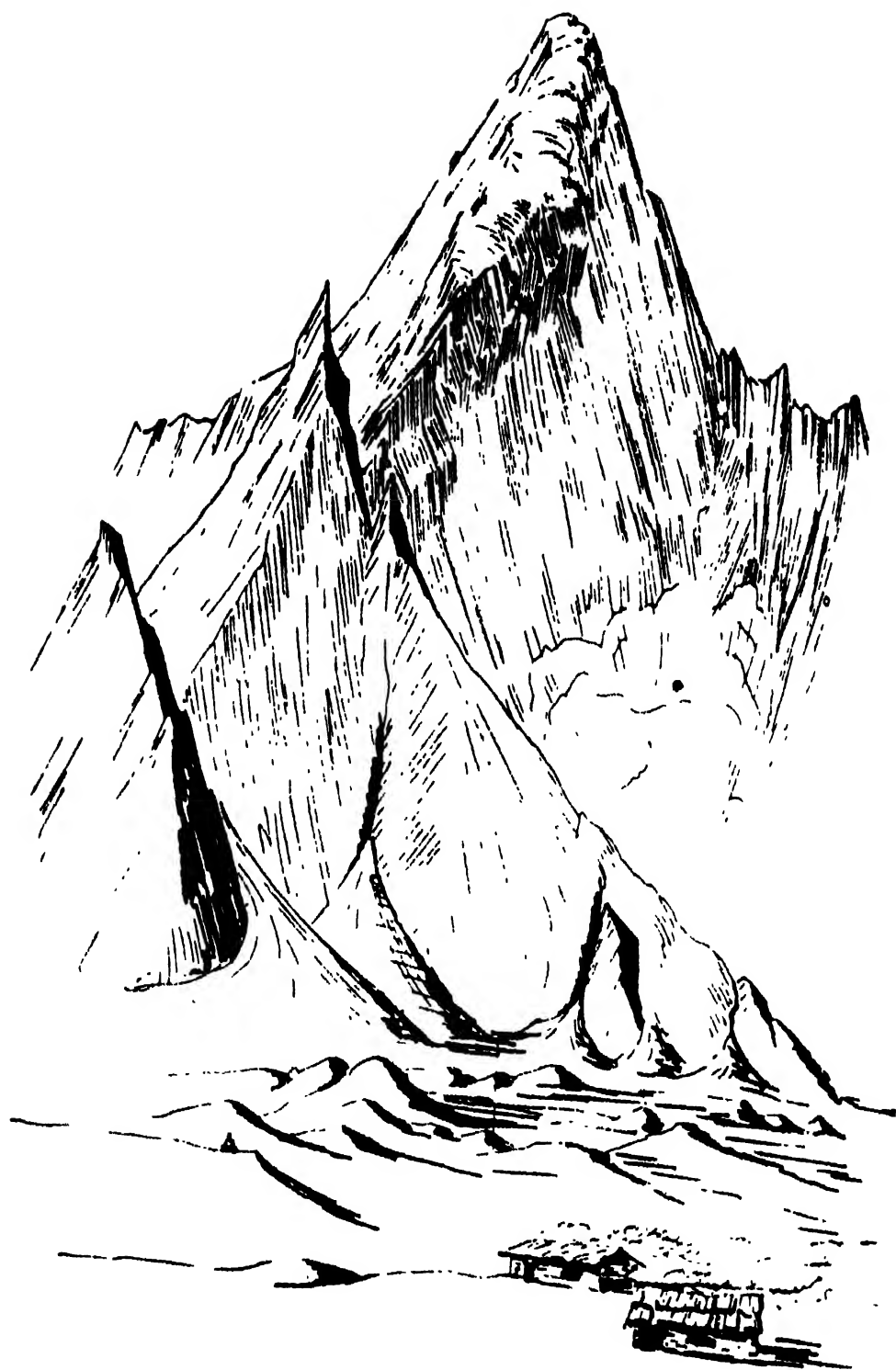
*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost

The northern valleys of Sikkim can offer a lifetime of fun. We were lucky to have been there before the restrictions were clamped in. Towards the end of the trip, Zerksis Boga and myself sat near a slope full with blooming rhododendrons in different colours. 'We want to be buried here', was the thought. But of course we trekked on and still 'live' with the beauty of Sikkim.

Kondup lama, our guide, was the famous companion of Tensing Norgay. Still, after so many years, I cannot forget his dancing, drinking chang, driving hard bargains, route finding over impossible terrains and his laughter. He was the one to keep for the memories too.

Nepal, the trekkers' paradise, had an attraction for us too. Sir Edmund Hillary called Tashi Lapcha pass the most difficult one he has crossed. My wife Geeta still proudly holds that as her height record. The charms of Solu Khumbu and Arun valley belong to an another world. And what's good is that both the treks, from east Nepal and north Sikkim end at Darjeeling, where momoes are in plenty, *tomba* flows freely and my Sherpa friends are warmest. It is all in the game.



12

On the Sherpa Trail

1978

SOLU KHUMBU, in the northeast Nepal, is the homeland of Sherpas. Most of the famous climbing Sherpas hail from the upper district Khumbu, while the Sherpas of lower Solu district are traders. These Sherpas had close relations with Tibet in the north and were engaged in regular trade with them, while not much contact was established with people in the plains. Earlier in this century, Sherpas at first migrated to Darjeeling which was developing as a major climbing centre due to the opening of Tibet. Many Sherpa families settled down there for better employment and trading and Darjeeling became another homeland for them. As a consequence, regular contact developed between these two hilly regions. They used to follow three major high-level routes to and from Darjeeling. The northernmost was to cross the difficult Amphu Lapcha pass to Barun valley, Lumbasamba Himnal and to Walungchung Gola. Then on to Ghunsa, Tseram to Sikkim via Kang la and on to Darjeeling. The second route went a little south from Luckla over Pagong Dara, Salpa Dara to Arun valley. Then passing through the prosperous towns of Chainpur and Taplejung it crossed over to Sikkim via Chhiya Bhanjang or Phalut. The lower route followed from Solu region via Okhaldhunga, Terrathum to Illam and Darjeeling. All the routes were 14-18 days in duration and passed over rugged terrain in most remote areas.

Solu Khumbu Sherpas had regular contact with Kathmandu also in the west. Here two major routes were popular. The higher going over Tashi Lapcha pass (5820 m) to Rolwaling valley and to Kathmandu via Dolkha in 10 days. The lower route, which is now the famous Everest Trail, followed from Luglha to Jumbesi, Lamosangu to Kathmandu. Now with an airport at Lughla, many Sherpas fly to

Kathmandu and proceed by bus to Darjeeling and the above routes are not used by them for long journeys.

We followed the old 'Sherpa Trail' from Kathmandu over Tashi Lapcha pass to Solu Khumbu and then to Darjeeling via Salpa Dara, Taplejung, Chhiya Bhanjang, covering 375 km in 40 days of trekking. We crossed 7 passes ranging from 2200 m to 5800 m crossing watersheds of major river valleys including Bhote Kosi, Dudh Kosi, Arun, Tamur and Kabeli. On an average these river beds were at an elevation of 600 m with their watersheds at 3000 m thus making us climb and descend about 4880 m to cross one river valley. As one journalist put it, this whole area has missed the great invention of mankind, in the last century, the wheel. There were prayer-wheels, but no hand carts, bullock carts and no mechanized transport except two small airports. Everything is carried on human shoulders as even animal transport is limited to yaks. But the region is rich in beauty and friendly people and inviting for mountaineers.

We were five, Zafar Vasi, Rajendra and Rupal Desai, Geeta and Harish Kapadia. From Kathmandu, we reached Barabhhise on the Kodari highway on 26 April 1978, with the Sherpa Sirdar Jangbu and about 9 porters. The track climbed up to Rolla Bhanjang, 2290 m in two days and we descended to Charikot-Dolkha, the district headquarters, on the banks of Bhote Kosi also known as Tambe Kosi. Proceeding along the river bank we camped at Pikoti and Ghungar to turn east, entering the Rolwaling valley. The climb to Simi, 2440 m and Beding, 3200 m was through very rich forest to begin with but the last portions were totally eroded. Beding is an enchanting place with waterfalls, open valleys and a close view of the east face of Gaurishankar, (7134 m). Nagaon (4050 m) was the last village in the valley. Rolwaling has the largest Sherpa settlement outside Solu Khumbu and has close contact with the neighbouring district. 4 May was spent leisurely at Nagaon repacking and acclimatizing. The route ahead climbed gradually to Chobuk lake, 4570 m, over boulder-filled moraine. We had to rest here an extra day as Zafar was not acclimatizing well. He had to be sent down in the evening with a Sherpa and after receiving an 'all well' note from him we proceeded ahead. As we learned later, his condition surprisingly deteriorated even after a further descent and he had to summon a helicopter to be rescued in a hurry. A costly affair.

For the next two days, we proceeded gradually along the lateral moraines to camp at the base of the icefall. Jangbu missed the tradi-



Tashi Lapcha pass

tional route and was caught in two bad avalanches along with Geeta and a porter. Luckily they escaped but we lost all our ropes and were left to cross the 5790 m pass without any ropes. The route through the icefall was steep and rather dangerous, passing underneath many a hanging ice tower. We camped on the upper snowfield at Tolbeding, (5670 m). Starting early on 10 May, and going over a few crevasses and a huge bergschrund, we reached the pass by 9 a.m. Sir Edmund Hillary, who pioneered the crossing of this pass for mountaineers in 1951, has described it as the most difficult and spectacular. We missed all the views due to bad weather in the east. Our descent was quick on the other side and, covering 28 km in a day, we rushed down to Thami by evening. Next day we reached Khumjung and Namche Bazar in the heart of Solu Khumbu. Fresh purchases in the traditional and colourful bazar at Namche on a Saturday was a very costly job. The rates were exorbitant, quality poor and quantity difficult to procure. It would have been cheaper to fly all our provisions here from Kathmandu. After rest and enjoying the excellent scenery of Sagar-matha Himal (Everest) we walked down to Luglha. We spent time talking to trekkers and mountaineers from various parts of the world and heard the original recordings of the climb of Everest without oxygen by Messner and Habeler from a journalist. Along with steep prices and commercialism there are few advantages of the great trekkers' influx into Sherpaland. However the area looked clean and with many facilities. Geeta flew home from Luglha, as scheduled, while we proceeded on the second half of our trek on 16 May.

The route now was at altitudes ranging from 600 m to 3350 m with luxuriant forests in remotely situated valleys. We crossed Pagong Dara (2590 m) and Surke Dara (2290 m) crossing Inkhu khola and Hongu khola respectively. Sherpa villages were now far and few and only on the higher ridges, with hot valleys being occupied by Tamangs. We were caught off guard in a flash flood and lost some of our kitchen items as we passed through, observing the changing customs and way of life. On 21 May, we climbed to Sanam, the last Sherpa village on our way, to be welcomed by an old lady literally studded with gold ornaments. At Salpa Dara (2900 m), we crossed out of Sherpaland to Arun valley in Khandbari district and Kumbhakarna Himal. It was a land of Kshetri villages and our Sherpa porters were clearly feeling out of place. We had to cross small rivers umpteen times over varieties of bamboo bridges, and the whole region was rather tropical. After two days, we reached the gorge of the river

clearly feeling out of place. We had to cross small rivers umpteen times over varieties of bamboo bridges, and the whole region was rather tropical. After two days, we reached the gorge of the river

Arun, the largest river in the East Nepal. It was hot and windless as we crossed Arun dangerously in a small and leaking canoe carved out of a tree-trunk. Walking along the river to Tumlingtar was a torrid experience. On 24 May we climbed to Chainpur. This was by far the most beautiful and rich town in the valley with an excellent view of Makalu. We admired those large houses with the nearest roadheads at least 12 days away. Chainpur to Nundhaki and Milke Danda (3080 m), was again the same story of ups and downs. At Milke Danda in the evening, we were treated to some good scenery of Makalu, Jannu, Kangchenjunga and all the surrounding ranges. It was a magnificent display of beauty in changing colours of sunset and it made our whole trip to East Nepal worthwhile. The forest north of Milke Danda was like a walk in paradise. It had varieties of orchids, rhododendrons, lilies, colourful birds and butterflies, all against the backdrop of the above mountainscape.

Again we descended to 600 m level to Dobhan at the confluence of Mewa khola with Tamur. We were in the soldiers' land as all the villages are famous for their fighting qualities in the Gurkha regiments of the Indian and British armies. We met many retired soldiers and heard battle stories. Taplejung, the district headquarters, situated in Lumbasamba Himal, is an administrative town of historic importance. Following the route, we descended to cross the hot banks of Kabeli, the last river gorge of our trek, to enter Kangchenjunga Himal and Panchthar district. All the villages were poor and the area far from inviting. Chyangthapu was the last village on the Nepal side with a border check-post. Customs 'officials' went through all our items thoroughly, mainly out of curiosity as no other party had passed for a long time. The climb to Chhiya Bhanjang (3903 m), was gradual and at last we were on the Singalila ridge and entered Sikkim, India. We climbed down to Uttare and Dentam for a taxi to Darjeeling, thus completing our 'Sherpa Trail'.

13

North Sikkim

1976

IT ALL began on a Sunday morning. Zerksis Boga and I were asking each other. Where to this year? Suddenly Sikkim was thrown open to Indian mountaineers. By a coincidence, I was reading a book on Sikkim and that helped us to make up our minds on a long trek to North Sikkim. We trekked to Green Lake (4940 m) and crossed four high passes—Tangchung la (5150 m), Thieu la (5212 m), Lungnak la (5035 m) and Sebu la (5852 m), in all covering 240 km.

We reached Gangtok, still uncertain about the inner-line permits, as there were no precedents or procedures available. Four days of hectic activity of telegrams and telephones to Delhi followed. At last, Mr. H.C. Sarin, the President of The Indian Mountaineering Foundation, came to our rescue and we were allowed to proceed. We were the first mountaineers in the region after a closure of 15 years.

Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, to Chungthang (1561 m), a 96 km journey, was covered in 12 hours in a crowded bus. Next day, amidst pouring rain, we reached Lachen (2728 m). We arranged for 9 Tibetan porters, with Kondup Lama as a guide-cum-Sirdar. He was middle-aged, but very thorough and knew the area like the back of his hand. These Bhotia porters were a great asset. They were sturdy in build and noisy in manner.

At Lachen dak bungalow, going through the Visitors Book was like a glance through mountaineering history. There was mention of all the expeditions to Kangchenjunga and of the pre-war expeditions to Everest. These Everest expeditions passed through from Lachen in March and returned by late August. Sadly, in the return entry, some names were missing of those who had died on the mountains.

Zemu Glacier and Green Lake (4934 m)

Six km ahead of Lachen, at Zema, the route to Zemu glacier turns to the west. On a small bridge, we crossed the Zemu Chhu, which was to be our constant companion from now onwards. Soon, we ran into a difficult route over landslides, for 13 km making our progress slow. We were to encounter this kind of terrain almost throughout, as Zemu Chhu had swept its banks during the floods of 1968. By late afternoon, we reached Tallem where the Lhonak Chhu from the north meets Zemu Chhu. We camped on a little clearing as it poured down all night. Next day, we had the first view of Kangchenjunga (8598 m). Even at a distance, it appeared majestic in form and bold in outline. We crossed a small bridge to Jedang and climbed up to Shobuk. This route is a walk in paradise. We passed at least twenty different kinds of rhododendrons, varying in colour from white to the deepest red, and in height from trees of 6 m to shrubs of not more than a foot. We were particularly lucky in that so many varieties were flowering at the same time. After leisurely climbing, we descended to Jakthang at the bank of the river, exactly opposite the valley leading to Kishong la.

Next day, we crossed a small bridge over Thomphyak Chhu, where we met a Lepcha shikari, who had possibly crossed over from Kishong la (5208 m). He looked bewildered and seemed like a figure wandered out of an earlier world, where man was closely allied to nature. He disappeared after giving us a long stare. After the bridge, the original route has been washed out by floods and it is boulder-hopping all the way to Yabuk (3978 m).

On the 13th, we made a late start with cloudy weather, wind blowing ceaselessly and the terrain getting more rugged. We passed three long moraine fields, looking like deserts, past the Rest Camp (4570 m), to camp at about 4730 m.

It cleared for a while in the morning. In the front was Siniolchu (6887 m), tilting against the sky, lifting its silver spear. There is no other mountain that can equal Siniolchu in beauty and boldness. Douglas Freshfield, who had seen many mountains on earth, spoke of it as the most beautiful peak in the world and the most superb triumph of mountain architecture. The impression it made on us was indelible. We made a delayed start for Green Lake, which was rather close and which we reached in 8 hours. The Green Lake proper has disappeared after the floods. We camped at (4935 m) on open ground.

15 May started with a thick fog and wind. We decided to hold the fort for the day and we literally had to hold on to our tent poles as it turned into a strong blizzard by late afternoon. The mist lifted only next day, revealing to us, for the first time, walls of the great amphitheatre at the head of Zemu glacier. We were face to face with Kangchenjunga, the highest peak in India and the third highest in the world. 12 km away, it rose to a height of 8000 m above us in a broad line of cliffs of terrific steepness.

After drying our equipment and having a quick lunch, we decided to move up 600 m above us for better views. This we did in the next 4 hours, trudging in snow and on rock. We were rewarded with a grand panorama of the Kangchenjunga divide and distant Chomolhari in Bhutan.

We were down the next day for lunch and divided ourselves in two parties. Boga, with a porter, started off towards the Nepal Gap glacier. He could observe the Nepal Gap, the Zemu Gap and the glacier system to the north. I, with another porter, descended to the bed of Zemu glacier and proceeded towards its junction with the Twins glacier. The Zemu glacier has receded almost to the base of the Kangchenjunga wall and it was an all-moraine walk with many small green lakes. It is said to pose a big threat to Sikkim, as when it melts or pours heavily it can cause unprecedented havoc through floods.

That evening, we lit a huge camp fire and sat around watching the colours of the sunset. We noticed, more than once, a peculiarity referred to by Sir J. Hooker, the false sunset in the east, where a glow, as strong as that of the sunset appears as a separate source of illumination. We saw a magnificent full moon, with Kangchenjunga radiating the glow. The romantic beauty of the landscape was almost beyond belief.

Tangchung la (5150 m)

On the 18th, we moved down to a little below Rest Camp. We were now to follow the high level trade route of old days, now out of use. It follows via Kishong la, Tangchung la, Theu la and Naku la into Tibet. We started climbing steeply towards Tangchung la. The Bhotia porter has, through practice of generations, become so indifferent to the angle of his track, that he prefers a ladder path to any reasonable zigzag, even when heavily laden. Many a time, we lost the path and had to resort to maps, as our guide was also repeating the route after a number of years.

All along the route, we came across what appeared to be cairns marking the route. On closer approach, they proved to be plants, stalks of the giant rhubarb *Rheum nobile*. The plant measures 45 inches in diameter at the base of the cone and is about the same height. We crossed Yakjuknamteng ground and reached the pass over rocky terrain and strong winds.

The Tangchung la is a broad, but not deep gap, guarded on both sides by rocky eminences. One of the neighbouring crags has a curious resemblance to a large bird. The summit, east of the pass, Tangchung Khang (5303 m) could be easily climbed when free of snow and would afford a grand panorama. In the north, was Thieu la (5212 m) separated from us by a gulf of 900 m.

On the other side, was a steep descent in deep snow. We passed three lakes and then the last slopes of thick scrub of juniper and rhododendrons. We camped at Theulacha, after crossing the river Thomphyak Chhu.

Thieu la (5212 m)

20 May dawned cloudy and it was snowing till noon. As it cleared a little by late afternoon, we decided to climb up to the pass and camp there. We followed a steep ridge, flanking a nala and then crossed three long boulder-filled fields to camp 33 m below the actual pass. We were up and about early next day and climbed up to the pass. A magnificent panorama opened in front of us. On the northeast was Lungnak la (5035 m), Khangchengyao (6889 m) to the north, Naku la (5270 m) leading to Tibet and the proper continuation of the trade route we had been following. To the northwest, was Chorten Nyima (6927 m). To the south, the tips of the peak of Zemu shot up over the white shoulders of the intervening ridge of the Tangchung la.

We descended to Lango to meet our first yaks. We lunched luxuriously on a hillock looking over a spread of wide valley, gravelly and flat. We were in Lhonak. There are no trees, no rhododendrons, no shrubs, except for a few stunted junipers, no turf, only sparse grass, good enough for yaks. The slopes below the snow were brown and yellow, the flats, pale and grey. We crossed the long wind-swept plateau to Teblhe and Muguthang (4520 m) after fording the ice-cold Langbo Chhu in knee-deep water. Muguthang is a place of nine winter months and its July snowstorms are proverbial. It is a land of moraine and a monument of diminished glaciers.

Lugnak la (5035 m)

From Muguthang, we turned to the east, off the trade route we were following. In two hours of gentle climbing, Charub Chho (lake) was reached. The angle steepened from here onwards, with soft snow. Two steep climbs led us to a sharp depression in the ridge, which was the pass. Lugnak la was first crossed by White, the political officer in 1895 and again by Dr Kellas in 1910, who pronounced it as too difficult and dangerous for laden porters. On the other side, the slopes were as a rule so steep that, though we often plunged above our knees, gravity helped us to get forward. A long descent led us to the valley floor to Chhoptra bridge ahead to Thangu (3920 m), where we had a day's rest.

Sebu la (5352 m)

From Thangu, we decided to move northeast to Sebu la, leading into the Lachung valley. The terrain ahead was a huge plain with mud and water, climbing up gently. We camped near the ruins of the Himalayan Club hut, in the company of a yak-herd.

We made an early start on the 25th. The route followed a steep scree slope till we reached the snowline, deep with fresh snow. For the first time, the sturdy porters started complaining. Boga led off on a small rock wall and fixed ropes to haul up the loads. Looking behind, we could see the whole Kangchenjunga divide. After an hour of trudging on snow, suddenly the worst of Sikkim weather came to our rescue, as clouds started rolling in with strong winds. This consolidated the fresh snow enough to restore some confidence in our porters. Soon we were scrambling up on all fours. At the top, it was difficult to locate the pass exactly and we were now waiting for a clearance in the weather. After an hour, we hit the correct pass and went down steeply on the other side to Sebu Chho. The upper lake, surrounded by the icefall of Chombu peak, caused havoc in 1950, through floods. By late evening, we were comfortably settled at Mome Samdong hot springs (4624 m).

In bright sunshine, we walked down to Yumthang, with excellent views of Donkya Ri (6190 m) and Pauhunri (7125 m). Yumthang dak bungalow is the biggest and the best in the region, with hot springs nearby. We walked through the most beautiful countryside to Lachung, where we 'surrendered' to the army hospitality and a lift back to Gangtok via Chungthang.

Himachal Pradesh

In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal.

—The Skanda Purana

If you live within 24 hours' distance from the Himalaya, as I do, then Himachal Pradesh holds the best attraction. Within a week or two you can climb and trek to your satisfaction. And it can be challenging; in fact, we nearly lost our lives in the Kulti valley. As Monesh and myself climbed up, the altimetre fluctuated wildly. We came down fast. The ensuing storm killed many, while we narrowly escaped.

With groups of 2 or 4, I have been visiting the Dhaula Dhar range often. Two most memorable trips have been to climb small peaks in winter with Muslim as my sole companion. Going around Chamba Kailash in winter is something I will not do again. These ranges are neglected because of their lesser heights. But great fun lies in store for those who will look behind them.

I could visit Kinnaur only once and my foray was snowed out. But the excursion was enough to encourage a future trip. Where else do you have to sit down for lunch in a bungalow with goggles, for fear of becoming snow-blind due to the reflections from the opposite peaks?



14

A Quick Visit to Kulti

1986

'WE WILL GO "in a hurry hurry" and come back quickly'. Monesh was urging me to take advantage of the nearness of the Himalaya and a short vacation. It was difficult to resist against such youthful exuberance.






We were off to Lahul on 7 November 1986. A short flight from Delhi landed us at Kulu (Manali) and next day we reached Rohthang pass, the gateway to Lahul.

Kulti must be the most visible valley of Lahul. Scores of travellers crossing Rohthang could see its peaks rising across the Chandra river. They all look beautiful, challenging and so close that a fly-over could be built from the pass. But the dream sequence ends here. The valley is not much frequented; certainly not by mountaineers; not much observed and recorded; and there is no fly-over. We descended to Khoksar and proceeded on the northern bank of Chandra. The entrance to the Kulti valley is 6 km to the southeast. We reached here in three days from home, with not much expense. BC is just a day away, which was reached over a well-trodden path suitable for mules.

I got up at the 'Sara Flats', our site of BC (3810 m) with shouts of 'It's solid cold' as Monesh changed clothes in -10° C. He had slipped into the Kulti early in the morning. But that seemed to give him ideas. With Milind, he left to try a small peak (c. 5030 m) opposite our camp. Ashwin and myself trekked to the head of the valley to the northern edge of the Sara Flats. A steep and vicious icefall cut off the route. Huge reddish rock, called Laldhang, was on the right while a narrow trek over the scree and rock on the left allowed a possible access above the icefall to Losa. By evening we gathered around—the first party with the satisfaction of a good acclimatizing climb and we with our knowledge of the valley.

THE KULTI VALLEY

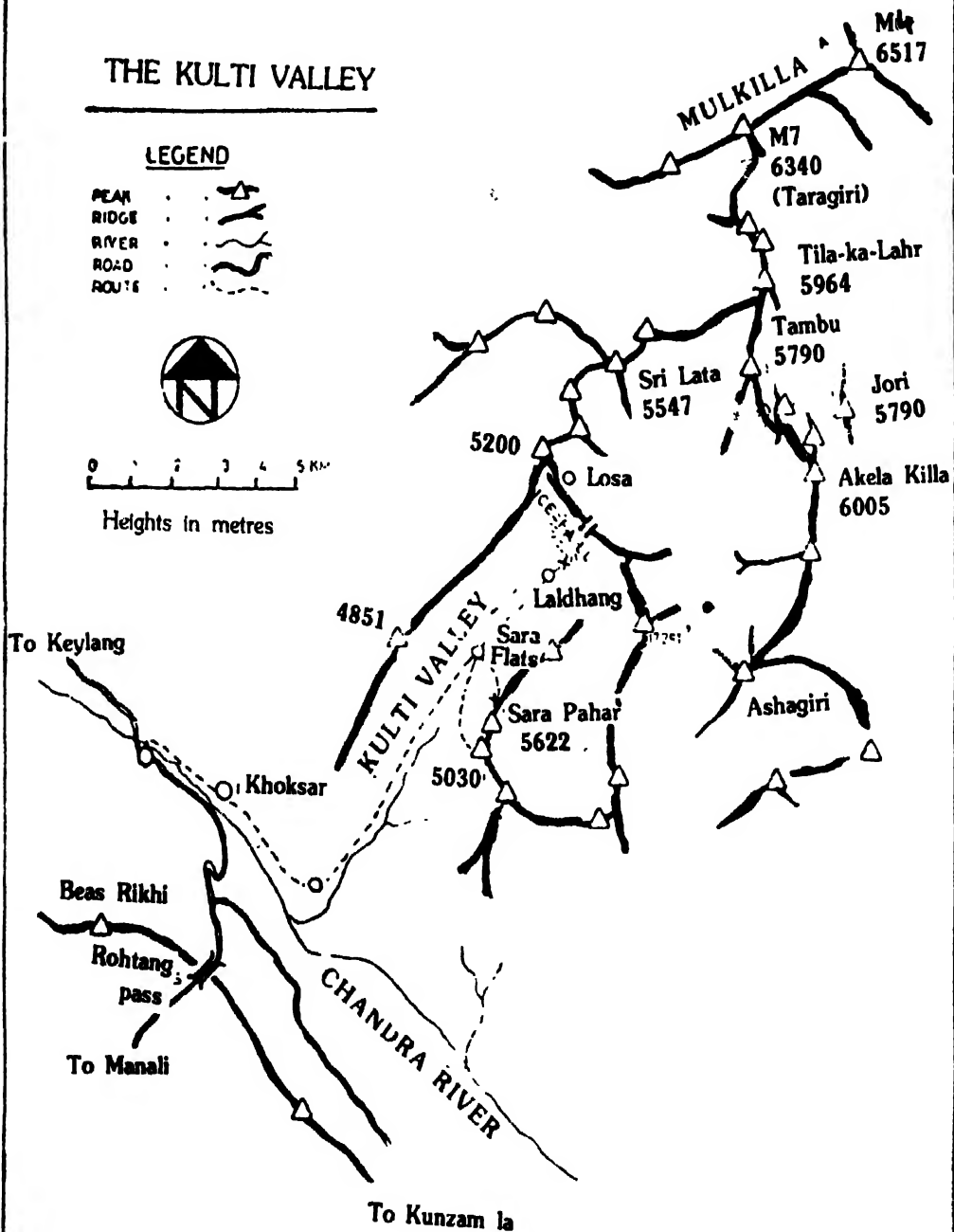
LEGEND

- PEAK : 
- RIDGE : 
- RIVER : 
- ROAD : 
- ROUTE : 



0 1 2 3 4 5 KM

Heights in metres



The first record of a visit to the Kulti valley was from the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association Expedition in 1955.¹ After many struggles elsewhere they had reached the Sara Flats and established camps above the icefall. On the west lies Sri Latta (5547 m), an easy giant mass. Straight on is the shapely 'Tambu' (or Tent peak) (c. 5790 m) with Jori (Twins) (c. 5790 m) next to it. The head wall is rounded off by the steep and difficult Akela Killa (Lonely Fort). Once on the upper moraine all these are possible in a few days. A passage between the Tambu and Jori (nicknamed 'Belvedere') leads to the north, onto the central Lahul plateau.

The RAFMA expedition had climbed and named all the above peaks. They passed through the passage to climb Tila-ka-Lahr (waves), 5964 m and finally M7 (Taragiri), 6340 m from the south ridge. Thus Kulti is a possible gateway to the highest horizons. In the recent years few parties have climbed in the area and only the climbs of Tambu and Jori were repeated. In the adjoining valley in the west above the village of Khoksar a disused path leads over Tempo la (c. 5780 m) to Milang glacier and Darcha. On the east lies the CB group of peaks and its peaks can be attempted by their western reaches from here. We had aims of spending a week in the valley, observing and studying the above peaks at close quarters. We hoped to attempt 'Sara Pahar' a shapely peak of 5622 m on the east of the valley above the Sara Flats.

After photographing and recording the peaks, we started off on 14 November. Crossing Kulti nala was a cold but not a difficult affair. We entered a steep nala and then followed a moraine ridge. A camp was made at 4725 m. Next day Monesh and myself pushed up. Our idea was to establish another high camp at foot of the summit pyramid. The other two went down. We promised to join them in a day for our second stove had failed and they could not have been comfortable for long. In the event we reached about 5334 m by late afternoon and saw huge black clouds swirling over from the northwest. The altimeter jumped steeply and we had a strong inclination of an approaching storm. We decided to rush down to our BC, which we did before nightfall. And it was a terrible night; the storm raged unabated and left about 1 m of snow. Late afternoon next day we packed up and the only thing to do was to rush down. The radio was warning us of

1. See *H.J.*, Vol. XIX, p. 117 and *Alpine Journal*, Vol. 61, p. 45.

further storms. In two days we retraced our steps back to Khoksar in very deep soft snow. Hard work indeed.

Next day we got a lift in an open truck as a snow-cutter removed snow like a giant dinosaur. But we shivered in the wind on Rohthang and were comforted by man's best friend—arrack, from a local co-passenger who knew how to look after himself. Back at Manali we realised how lucky we were, for this storm had left about 80 persons dead on Zozi la in the west, few trekkers were reported missing and many villages were buried

Though we came back 'quickly quickly', it was enough to record the impressions of the enormous climbing possibilities in Kulti valley. In a short time one can climb peaks of various difficulties in the unspoilt and unfrequented area within a ten-day holiday and at great economy one can have a feel of real mountains, if 6100 m is your choice. As my young friend would put it: 'There is solid climbing around'!

15

Around Kailash in Fourteen Days

1983

IN HINDU mythology, Kailash is the legendary home of Shiva. And perhaps because of that many ranges have peaks named Kailash. Kailash (6714 m) above Manasarovar in Tibet is the holiest, believed to have been climbed by the Chinese. For those who could not make the arduous pilgrimage to Tibet there is 'Baba Kailash' (6322 m) near the Tibetan border between Darma and Kuthi valleys. In Garhwal (Gangotri) we have Sri Kailash (6932 m) the easiest of Shiva's abodes. It was first climbed by the Austrian team in 1938. More to the west is Kinnaur Kailash (Jorkanden) (6473 m) above Kalpa, a fear-somely difficult peak. Last comes Kailash (5656 m) in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. It is also called Mani Mahesh Kailash after the holy lake to its west. This is perhaps the most difficult of all the abodes. Changing houses must be difficult, even for Shiva!

In the winter of 1983 we decided to invite ourselves to this last home of Shiva. A traditional route circuits the mountain and it is usually only possible to do so during September. It is an 80 km *parikrama* over a high pass of 4938 m. It was also our aim to climb the peak. Kailash was climbed by a large Indo-Japanese Ladies Expedition in 1968.¹ Upon studying their article and photographs the peak seemed an easy climb, even in winter.

We prepared for the trip in earnest, having not much experience of winter. Ultimately we found that it was best to follow the early travellers. 'In our outfit we were much more fortunate. We had learnt from experience that the secret of true comfort lies in the elimination

1. See Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (Darjeeling) Journal, 1968, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 54.

of the unessential rather than in the collection of masses of material. I hasten to add that our standard of food and warmth was high!'²

On 3 December 1983 we were at Chamba. It was cold, deserted and wore an autumnal look. A local *Panwala* enlightened us about various legends of Kailash.

'The mountain shakes when someone tries to climb it. The *jarra* takes place in early September and on the appointed date at 4 a.m. there is a sudden flow of water in the lake and everyone jumps in to take a bath.'

The area abounded with Kailash legends. Everything bore relation to Shiva—there were pictures, stories and names.

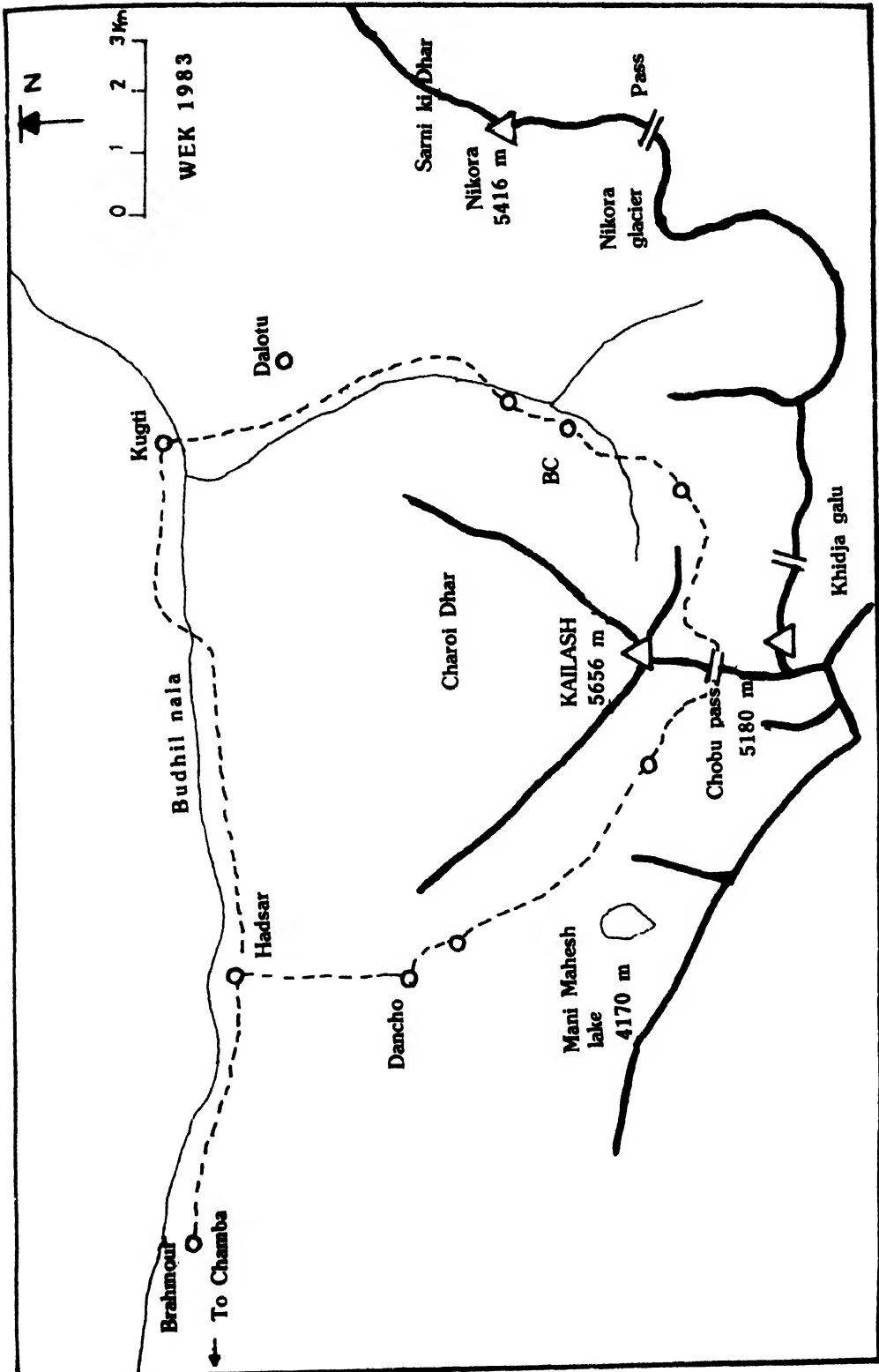
On 4th we left for Brahmour. The bus left us at Khadamukh where a bridge lies incomplete for last two decades.

'The local M.P. is always from the opposition, and hence our bridge is not completed.' 'Can't Shiva do something about it?'

'He is the God of destruction and not construction! Anyway Shiva had elected a representative of the ruling party in this election and the bridge will be hopefully completed in few years.'

At Lahul we had the first and the only view of Kailash (west face). It looked frightening, isolated and massive. Brahmour was cold and the famous Kailash temple complex looked deserted. We made final preparations, loaded our 35 kg rucksacks and started for Hadsar (13 km) on the jeepable track. Autumn was in full glory and reaching Kugti (13 km) on the 6th was a pleasure beyond words and a pain beyond complaining due to the heavy loads and cold. We turned south here and followed Bhujla nala for two days to establish ourselves at the junction of Nikora and Kailash nala. On the 9th, Muslim and Kartik moved along the valley to retrace our route. Dhiren and I climbed up an adjoining mountain ridge to observe Kailash. In the southwest a shapely snow-peak appeared and we recognized it from the pictures from the ladies team which we were carrying. This was the peak between Khidja Galu and Chobu pass, and climbed by the ladies in 1968. To its north (difference of 15' from that snowy peak, to be precise) towered a huge monolith of rock and ice. It had a steep gradient and complicated rock-pinnacles. No route appeared feasible on that. Dhiren lost a compass-bearing-reading bet and we firmly established that the stupendous monolith was the true Kailash peak. The *Panwala* was right. He had challenged: 'No one can climb Kailash. If

2. 'A Chukkar in Himalaya' by Captain H. L. Wyndham, *H.J.*, Vol. VIII, p. 119.



Chamba Kailash area.

anyone climbs it I would reject Shiva as God! And if you climb it now in the cold I'll treat you to a free *paan*!'

In the evening Muslim confirmed our observation: 'The true Kailash is so steep from the higher camp that my neck is sprained looking up to it.'

We moved up in two camps to 4330 m. The cold increased and the weather deteriorated. We intended to climb the 'Ladies Peak' which is about 5180 m and then complete the *parikrama*. On 13th Dhiren and I opened route till Chøbu pass, c. 4940 m. It was a steep route over scree and the last traverse under overhanging rocks scaring away all but the staunch devotees. The view to north revealed a number of shapely peaks on Lahul-Chamba divide. There are famous passes. This area can be a trekkers' and climbers' paradise.

We gathered at the upper camp, and from that evening we were tent-bound for the next 3 days. A violent snow-storm engulfed us. Those were three miserably cold, long days. The temperature dropped to -25°C at times.

At night it was fearfully cold. In spite of wearing an under-garment, woollen shirt, pullover and being rolled into a sleeping-bag, we were frozen. We joked with each other to forget the cold.

'I have read somewhere that the more clothes one wears, the colder one feels.'

'This is no time to go stripping.'

'How does Shiva stay atop just in a loin-cloth?'

To us, in one of these moments of insane optimism which no amount of cold-experience was capable of shattering, it seemed that we might, with a little luck, still complete at least the *parikrama*.

The 17th was clear and looking at the thermometer Dhiren shouted to the other tent.

'It is quite *warm* today. The temperature has risen to -12°C .'

Muslim's reply was unprintable! We had no time to wait. With hard labour we were at the pass in 7 hours. It was most fatiguing on the soft snow. On the other side a semi-circular basin plastered with fresh snow covered the route down. Half an hour later I led the descent. After a distance of 25 m a soft but unmistakable sound and the entire snow-slope under me in the semi-circular basin had avalanched. I was luckily riding on the top of it. It generated speed, tossed me around and stopped after 180 m, burying me a little. I scrambled out, unhurt, and looked up the path of the avalanche for signs of my companions. I could see no one and had the scare of my life. Where do I

look for them under such vast debris? There was a shout from above—they were above the line that had cracked! They glissaded down the avalanche path and enjoyed the fruits of my involuntary labour. We plodded on and camped at 4570 m thoroughly exhausted.

The snow-plod continued on the 18th. In 3 hours we were at the holy Mani-Mahesh lake at 4170 m. Cold biting wind pushed us steeply down. The track was well-made for the pilgrims. But few ice-tunnels invaded the track and it was complicated to overcome it on watery ice. We camped on the track at Dancho. Next morning Dhiren slipped on an ice-runnel and was carried down 30 m in a flash. Only the rucksack saved him from serious injuries.

We trekked down steeply and at last on 19th evening we were at Hadsar where a jeep picked us for night at Brahmour.

We were back at Chamba.

‘You could not have done the *parikrama* in this cold’. The *Panwala* did not believe us. Kartik threateningly pointed to his cold tips and toes as proofs.

‘All right, even though you could not reach the abode, have a free *paan*.’

We were happy to be warm and well-fed. Now we ate at Kailash dhaba, travelled by Kailash express, saw a movie at Kailash theatre and Muslim even gave admiring glances to damsel Kailash. We could afford to, after those cold days around the real Kailash!

16

A Winter Foray

1981

MORNING OF 21 December 1981. Muslim Contractor and myself left Bombay for Chamba in the Himachal Pradesh. In the light of what was to follow it may be noted that we were starting at sea-level and perhaps from the warmest climate in India at this time of the year, 30°C. After changing to buses at Pathankot and a night at Chamba (122 km), we were at Jyura (52 km). A most terrible jeep ride deposited us at Holi (16 km). For this ride two of us were hanging on the rear foot-board on one leg, protecting each other with the other leg. I was staring down the river Ravi while Muslim looked up towards the cliffs. Under such circumstances all the mountaineering training was most useful. But it almost ruined our trip. My sleeping-bag was torn by touching one of the overhanging cliffs. Luckily it was filled with Polar-guard. Otherwise the Ravi would have been polluted with feathers along with the many wooden logs it carried, and I would have been on my way back. This was on 23 December. In three days we were at 1830 m and 0°C. Our winter climbing trip began.

Reading about the various winter ascents of high peaks recently, we wanted to try it out ourselves. We planned to move with our carefully selected gear and food of about 60 kg on our own.

Christmas eve 1981 saw us starting with some of the most beautiful forest along the Ravi. The forests literally began where the road ended. To walk on the pine-needles was fun. The autumn colours were magnificent. For the night we settled at a forest rest-house at Nayagram (1980 m).

We wanted to enter the Bara Bangal valley to our north. But the local advice was against doing so. A 150 m wide rocky section is to be crossed. This when filled with water-ice becomes impossible to

negotiate. It was easy to imagine this as we had to cross, even on the first day, a few patches of water-ice. We were cutting steps and were about to put on crampons at this height. So we decided to turn south, towards Dhaula Dhar.

One reluctant porter agreed to carry with us. Again the beautiful forest accompanied us for 4 km, till we climbed and descended 450 m each to leave the Ravi and enter Jalsu valley. We passed a little below Surehi and camped at Chhani (8 km). A completely frozen waterfall presented a unique sight.

The 26th dawned cloudy and chilly. A steady climb brought us to Yada (2590 m). Our porter refused to move further, pointing to the sky, and even advised us to return. All along the way, villagers and officials alike advised us against proceeding. Such was the scare of winter for them. In the circumstances we decided to stay at the forest but at Yada and declared that as our base camp. We were totally alone in the valley soon. The temperature dropped to -8°C .

On the 27th we decided on some climbing activity. We left at 8.30 a.m. and followed a ridge above us. Steadily we climbed up, at first through forest and then on snow. The snow was powdery and we sank up to our knees almost regularly and sometimes up to our waist. But this was totally 'dry' snow. For the next few days such snow conditions were constantly experienced. At last we emerged on the broad summit ridge and reached a cairn at c. 4115 m. We were on the top of Yada peak. We plodded back, falling regularly, to our B.C. at 5.30 p.m. In 9 hours we had climbed and descended 3100 m.

On the 28th we followed the route to Jalsu pass to ferry luggage to our next camp at 3050 m. A very tiring affair on snow and long patches of water-ice in nalas. We occupied this camp the next day. Wintry conditions were extreme and we recorded -17°C . This northern part of Dhaula Dhar does not receive direct sunlight for 2-3 months during this period of the year. Coupled with some bad weather and breeze it made things most unpleasant for us. But we noticed that as long as we kept ourselves hydrated with lots of hot soup and tea and filled with carbohydrates things remained manageable. It was never possible to drink cold water, even when available.

On the 30th we could make our earliest start, at 8 a.m. With some efforts we reached the Jalsu pass (3253 m) in 3 hours. Now we were on the main crest of Dhaula Dhar. The route on the south dropped steeply to Baijnath and the Punjab plains. It had no snow. We followed a long ridge to the west. A long snow plod, some steep sections

and we were on Jalsu peak (4298 m). The view of Mani Mahesh range was excellent. For the return we followed a steep ridge to the north, rolling in snow, to reach the camp.

With the weather threatening to break any time, we decided to withdraw. We spent the new year's eve amidst forest at Chhani and sat talking round the fire. The dawn of 1982 was ushered in with clear skies and the two of us under lofty pine trees. In the next 4 days we were back to Chamba and Dharamsala. The weather broke immediately thereafter to give us a taste of what it could really mean. But we were well entrenched with excellent Tibetan food and the memories of our winter climbs under our belt.

17

Weeks in the Dhauladhar

THE KANGRA valley, through which I first passed, was bounded on my left-hand side—that is, the north-west—by the line of the Himalaya mountains, and on my right by the last outer ridges separating the mountains from the perfectly level plains of India. The valley itself was roughly about 3000 ft above sea-level. The line of mountains was fine, but it did not rise more than 16,000 ft above sea-level, and there were no single peaks of outstanding grandeur. On the whole, it gave the impression of a wall guarding vast wonders behind it. I was filled not much with admiration of what I saw as with curiosity to see what there was behind the wall. My spirits were eagerly pressing on to things not yet revealed.¹

Thus wrote Sir Francis Younghusband as he left Dharamsala on 30 April 1884 on his first Himalayan trip. He was young and with the exuberance of a would be famous explorer. Many after him were to find the wonders behind those walls. These walls, rising from the plains of Punjab, can be a climbers' playground. The white snow line on them gives its name, the 'white ridge', as seen from the plains of Kangra and Punjab.

The next famous name to be attracted to this lovely range was General C.G. Bruce in 1902.

The Kangra valley of the southern Punjab is in itself of great interest. . . . but the feature which gives special character to this district is the great wall of

1. *Wonders of Himalaya* by Sir Francis Younghusband, Chapter 1, p. 18.

Dhaolidhar range, which bounds the valley on the north, and may best be called the outer Himalaya. . . I wonder whether anywhere else in the world there is such an abrupt wall without foot-hills, for, as I have said, the broken hilly country of the Kangra cannot be described as foot-hills to this ridge. The rise is too abrupt, there is far too great a wall-like effect, and indeed from any of the points one passes on the ridge, the impression given is that of looking directly into flat country.²

He repeatedly visited the range for climbs and shikar and crossed it many times. With Major H.D. Minchinton he first attempted the Dhauladhar 'Matterhorn' in October 1909, having first climbed the 'Mon' in December 1904.

Based at the Dharamsala cantonment, Major H.D. Minchinton climbed regularly in the range, with a style which is rarely possible now-a-days.

My first climb here was on June 13, 1908. After playing hockey, I got off at 6 p.m., and reached my bivouac below Lakha at 10 p.m.³

Being lucky enough to be stationed at its base, he repeated his visits to the range regularly and made a number of fine ascents. After repeated attempts, he made the first ascent of the Dhauladhar 'Matterhorn' on 6 June 1913.

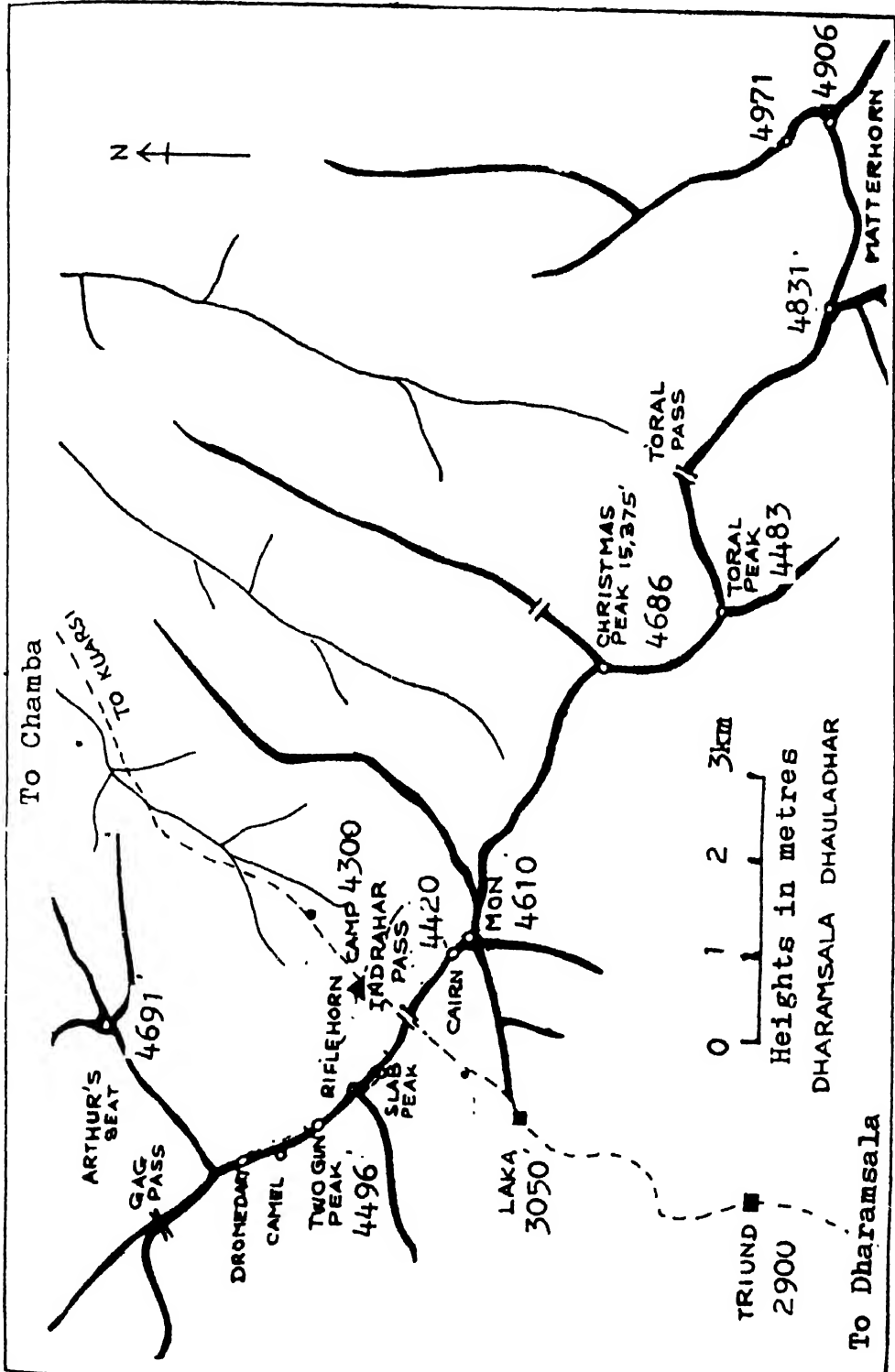
The view from the summit was extraordinary; everything below 13,000 ft, including the base camp at Lakha which we had hoped to see, was hidden by a vast mer de nuage extending to all appearances from far Kashmir to the plains of the Punjab, with numberless snow-capped and rock-pinnacled giants piercing through it. This time the peak had not won, but it had taken seven attempts, and a large amount of exertion at the last to defeat it.⁴

However Major Minchinton was finally killed while descending

2. *Twenty Years in the Himalaya* by Major The Hon. C.G. Bruce, pp. 67-68.

3. See *Alpine Journal* No. 206, November 1914, p. 384. 'Week-end Scrambles in the Kangra Himalayas' by M.D. Minchinton.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 393.



Dharamsala Dhauladhar.

'Mon' on 3 June 1927.

Incidentally in these early writings the Indrahara pass is called 'Andrea' pass. Phonetically it rhymes with 'Indra'. It gives an idea how many other Sanskrit names must have changed in the Himalaya.

The person who was most interested in the Dhauladhar was J.W. Rundall. His manuscript *Week-End Rambles & Scrambles in the Kangra Himalaya* is a comprehensive climbing manual for the range. Published on 3 June 1927 it gives exhaustive details of his climbs and defines the Dhauladhar accurately.

The Dhaoli Dhar range is a granite wall of mountains rising abruptly from the Kangra plains to an average height of some 14,000 ft. The highest peak (locally known as 'The Matterhorn') is just over 17,000 ft. It extends approximately from Dalhousie in the N.W. to Palampur in S.E. and is some 50 odd miles in length. The range divides Chamba in the north-east from the Punjab on this side, and at its south-eastern extremity joins the Bara Banghal ranges where the Thamsar pass leads over from above Baijnath into Bara Banghal. The Pir Panjal in Kashmir is practically a continuation of the Dhaoli Dhar range.

He describes peak 'Mon' as named after General Money of the erstwhile 1st Gurkhas and the Dhauladhar 'Matterhorn' as ' "Monarch of the Glen." The chief difficulty is its inaccessibility.' He failed to climb it despite two attempts.

Again in 1930 Lieut. P.R. Oliver made a few quick ascents⁵, including that of the Mon. But it was Col. J.O.M. Robert,⁶ who, again from the Dalhousie Cantonment, drove down to Dharamsala and spent some energetic week-ends there. He climbed many fine peaks around Indrahara pass but the 'Matterhorn' again defeated him. Thus, Major Minchinton remains the only person on record to have climbed it way back in 1913.

In the past decades I have visited the Dhauladhar range many times for a quick visit. Not being in the army or stationed at the cantonment nearby, I had to travel from Bombay, extending the week-end scrambles into week long climbing trips.

5. See *H.J.*, Vol. III, p. 99.

6. See *H.J.*, Vol. X, p. 164.

These trips generally went as follows: a fast train ride to Pathankot (1900 km and 28 hrs) from Bombay and a 4-hour bus ride (52 km) to Dharamsala (McLeodgunj), where we usually arrived on a Saturday afternoon. After momoes and beer one walked up to the Triund Forest hut (2900 m) for the night. Next day (via Laka, 3050 m) we'd climb up half way up to the Indrahara jot (4420 m, Mon pass), which we reached the day after. From a camp at 4300 m on the north of the pass many scrambles around are possible. Towards the north is Camel peak, with its distinct hump. Two-Gun (4469 m) are twins with domes, Dromedary Slab peak and Arthur's Seat (4691 m) are other peaks of prominence. A serrated ridge called, 'Arthur's Foot Stools' is inviting. All these are day-long climbs from the camp at the pass.

Towards the south, Cairn and Mon (4610 m) are challenging heights. Going across the valley Christmas peak (4686 m), Toral peak (4483 m) and others are accessible. Sometimes we approached the pass via Chamba and Kuarsi in a 3-day trek. 'Dhauladhar Matterhorn' has two of the highest summits of the range at 4971 m and 4906 m. All these peaks are of moderate difficulty if approached from the high camp in the north. But from the south they will provide a formidable challenge. Till late June the snow and ice, on the southern slopes specially, will provide the most opportune training ground for hard climbs.

The range continues in the NW to SE direction with many passes and peaks all along. A most inviting and a cheap climbing trip can be had here, compared to the other Himalayan ranges. The only spanner to throw in the works, is the rain, for the rainfall here is the second highest in India. But if you are willing to take your chances, you can climb a dozen peaks from Monday to Friday, and descend to Naoroji's store for beer, momoes and sunset from the balcony on Saturday. A train back home for work on Monday morning and a week of satisfying climbing under your belt.

Apart from climbing peaks, the Dhauladhar offers much more. On its crest there are many passes which link the Beas valley in the south to the Ravi valley in the north. The Toral pass, the Thamser jot and the Jalsu jot are the ones that I have reached. Lam dal is a beautiful lake quite close to Dharamsala. The view on both the sides from each of these passes and peaks is quite a contrast. Towards the south, your eyes will stretch over the plains of Punjab where a red glow due to the heat is seen. Towards the north, you can look over the mountains right from the Kishtwar range to the nearby Pir Panjal range. Brammah and

Sickle Moon peaks rise high above all the others.

The Pir Panjal range is one valley to the south of the Dhauladhar. A visit to this range can be easily combined with a trek in that range. The famous passes of Sach, Chobia, Kugti and Chombu have given me many good days. Many unexplored peaks, largely upto 6000 m, stand in this range. Except Wangyal peak near Bara Banghal, none of the others are known to have been climbed. With many glaciers, this valley offers an ideal training ground. For the enterprising trekkers there is the Taintu pass to the northeast, ahead of Bara Banghal village, for crossing over to the Beas valley near Manali.

The above is only a small list of suggestions which I have been fortunate enough to undertake in a week or two each from Bombay in the past decades. The pleasures of a Dhauladhar sunset over the Punjab plains is breathtaking. Once I saw a flock of Siberian cranes flying over the range in perfect symmetry. They were on their way to the annual sojourn in the Arabian Sea near Bombay. I was tempted to join them. If that were possible, I would have climbed more peaks and crossed many more passes in three-day trips instead of week long outings!

Though the climbing opportunities here are plenty, till today very little has been done, rather unfortunately. J.O.M. Roberts, in vain, forecasted in 1937.

The Dhauladhar has, I feel sure, a big future before it is in the history of Himalayan mountaineering; for here is an ideal and very accessible training-ground. Although there are no big glaciers, there are snow-climbs in plenty before the monsoon breaks and scores of first-class rock-climbs, especially on the Dharamsala side. Even a party of Munich experts with hammers, drills, pitons, and other ironmongery, would take some time before they solved the problems presented by the faces of 'Two-Gun Peak'—'the Mon', and the Dharamsala 'Matterhorn'.

The prophecy of J.O.M. Roberts has not come true even to a small degree. Perhaps big names and heights still dominate over the feelings for 'real' enjoyment. Anyway, for us Dhauladhar is certainly the playground one looks forward to. As General Bruce said, *Au revoir, Chamba!* Given health and strength, if I don't come back, as Brer Rabbit remarked, 'bust me right side inwards.'

18

A Note on Kinnaur

1986

KINNAUR CONJURES UP memories of the unknown and inaccessible valleys of the Hindustan-Tibet road; of the gorge of Satluj, and strange customs. It was a well-known district where Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* travelled to on his famous mission. But things have changed drastically since the time of Kim. Obnoxious 'progress' has taken over. But everything about it is not obnoxious. It has opened many advantageous possibilities for trekkers and mountaineers. While it previously took about two weeks of trekking to reach Kinnaur, now the National Highway No. 22 runs along the Satluj and is kept open almost throughout the year. One can take advantage of this to trek and climb in the beautiful district.

The earliest travellers-explorers to Kinnaur were the Gerard brothers in 1818.¹ Few others passed on the Hindustan-Tibet road. All the early writings are on how to reach Kinnaur and dangers along the road.² It was left to Marco Pallis in 1933 to bring these valleys to the notice of mountaineers through an article³ and a book.⁴ He climbed Leo Pargial and travelled on the Hindustan-Tibet road from the Baspa valley, crossing Lamkhaga pass on the way from Gangotri. There were many pilgrims who went around the Kailash massif clockwise, from Tirung valley; over Charang Ghati to Baspa and back. The tradition continues even today. The army and the Indo-Tibet Border Police (I.T.B.P.) who were the only ones allowed into this restricted area

1. 'In the Footsteps of the Gerards' by W.E. Buchanan, *H.J.*, Vol. II, p. 73.

2. 'The Way to Baspa' by Major D.G.P.M. Shwan, *H.J.*, Vol. I, p. 67.

3. 'Gangotri and Leo Pargial, 1933' by Marco Pallis, *H.J.*, Vol. VI, p. 106.

4. *Peaks and Lamas* by Marco Pallis (Cassell, London, 1939).

until recently, made many climbs.

Kalpa, situated in the centre of Kinnaur is the district headquarter. It has one of the finest views one can have while enclosed in a comfortable bungalow. 'From the forest bungalow at Chini, 2820 m above sea-level and 145 miles from Simla along the Hindustan-Tibet road, the Kailash massif is seen to advantage. The snow-fields are so close that in spring the reflected light from the snows is painful to the eyes, while during the monsoon the sound of falling avalanches can be heard all day long.'⁵

Incidentally the old name 'Chini' was hastily changed to Kalpa, just in case the Chinese had some other ideas! About 760 m below Kalpa is Rekong Peo. It is developing as the central bazar and administrative town. There are many buses which pass on the Hindustan-Tibet road; from Simla to Wangtu (where the inner-line begins), Karchham (turn southeast for Sangla, 17 km). Powari (for Rekong Peo (6 km) and Kalpa (13 km) in the north Akpa (for Morang and Tirung valley in SE), Shi Asu Khad (for Ropa valley in NW), Puh, Leo and Chango (for Leo Pargial in the east). The motorable road goes ahead to Kaurik, Sumdo to enter Spiti and reach Kaza.

An afternoon bus from Kalpa will reach Simla on the same day and Chandigarh the next morning. These developments, have opened up many possibilities for the local people and these valleys are far more accessible to mountaineers. And luckily it has not taken a heavy toll of the forest cover, culture and peace.

A lot has been written on the cultural aspect of Kinnaur. A fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism exists almost in totality. Every village has a temple and gumpa and all worship both. Various primitive traditions, beliefs and superstitions survive. Legends are held in awe. Though a large population is educated, many serve in the army, but you may be fined a sacrifice of a goat if you sit on a temple parapet with your shoes on! Human sacrifice was offered to the goddess in the earlier times and one can see a special square built for the purpose. Now animal sacrifice takes place regularly.⁶

Kinnauri architecture is a thing of beauty to behold. Perched on a hillock, Kamru Fort or some exquisite gompas and temples leave one breathless. It has plenty of fruit orchards and the valleys are rich and hospitable.

5. *Temples and Legends of Himachal Pradesh* by P.C. Roy Chaudhury (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1981).

6. 'Round the Kanwar Kailash' by H.M. Glover, *H.J.*, Vol. II, p. 81.

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6. 'Round the Kanwar Kailash' by H.M. Glover, *H.J.*, Vol. 11, p. 81.

For such a large district where people have travelled for years, it is not possible to record its mountain and mountaineering history exhaustively. What is attempted here is a brief resumé of possibilities in different valleys, important recorded history and updated information about approaches. This is based on the recent travels, treks and climbs.

Satluj literally cuts through the Himalayan chain near Shipki la and then runs through Kinnaur in the centre. There are four major valleys to its southeast and east.

Baspa valley

Captain Conway called this: ‘. . . the most lovely of all the Himalayan valleys’.⁷ Many would agree with this. Many have visited this valley; for it is connected by famous passes to its south with Garhwal. The important passes are:

- | | | |
|------------------|---|------------------------------|
| a) Buran Ghati | : | Sangla to Pabar gad |
| b) Rupin Ghati | : | Sangla to Rupin gad |
| c) Nargah Ghati | : | Sangla to Nargani khad |
| d) Singha Ghati | : | Mastarang to Supin gad |
| e) Khimloga Pass | : | Chhitkul to Supin gad |
| f) Borasu Ghati | : | Nagasti to Har-ki-Doon |
| g) Lamkhaga Pass | : | Upper Baspa valley to Harsil |

All these passes offer possibilities for trekking, small peaks and grand views. They have been crossed from time immemorial.

There are also two major passes which lead to Tibet. The famous one is Yamrang la (5570 m) and a little to its south is Gugairang pass.

For mountaineers the upper Baspa valley offers a lot by way of shapely peaks. Generally they are all around 5600-5900 m with about 5 peaks rising above 6000 m and the highest up to 6227 m. Many have passed through this valley but the climbing history is brief; perhaps due to the lack of higher peaks.

Col. Balwant Sandhu led an expedition here in 1976 which climbed Pk 6215 m and another peak north of Sui Thatang.⁸ Other visitors were: Jack Gibson on two trekking visits,⁹ Yamrang la visited

7. *Sunlit Waters* by Capt. C.W.W.S. Conway (Thacker, Bombay, 1942).

8. ‘Kinnaur—1976’ by Lt Col Balwant Sandhu, *H.J.*, Vol. XXXV, p. 224.

9. *As I Saw It* by Jack Gibson (Mukul, New Delhi, 1976).

in 1978¹⁰ and Soli Mehta across Lamkhaga pass in 1966.¹¹

The I.T.B.P. has been in the area for many years. Some officers have written warmly and authentically about the area.¹²

The I.T.B.P. has reported two climbs in the Baspa valley. These are amongst the three high peaks north of Dunthi. But unfortunately no accurate or written record is available and only local units confirm the climbs.

A good motorable road branches off at Karchham to Sangla, 17 km. It is extended further to Rakchham, 14 km and Shushung Khad, (13 km) 4 km short of Chhitkul. Buses ply regularly till Sangla and mostly further up till Shushung Khad. In a year or two the road will reach Chhitkul.

Tirung Valley (Tidong)

A valley north of Baspa. It has close connections with the Baspa valley across the Charang Ghati (5242 m). It runs in the east to Khimokul la (Gunrang la) to Tibet. A jeepable road leads from Morang to Thangi. Ahead, the road is being constructed till Charang.

Thangi has been used as a starting point to attempt the peaks in the Kinnaur-Kailash range. It also gives access to Phawararang (6349 m) which has been climbed a few times.¹³ Towards the northeast of Thangi lie two shapely peaks, both awaiting climbers. Sesar Rang is 6095 m and an unnamed peak 6248 m, both on the Tirung-Gyamthang divide.

Kinnaur-Kailash Range

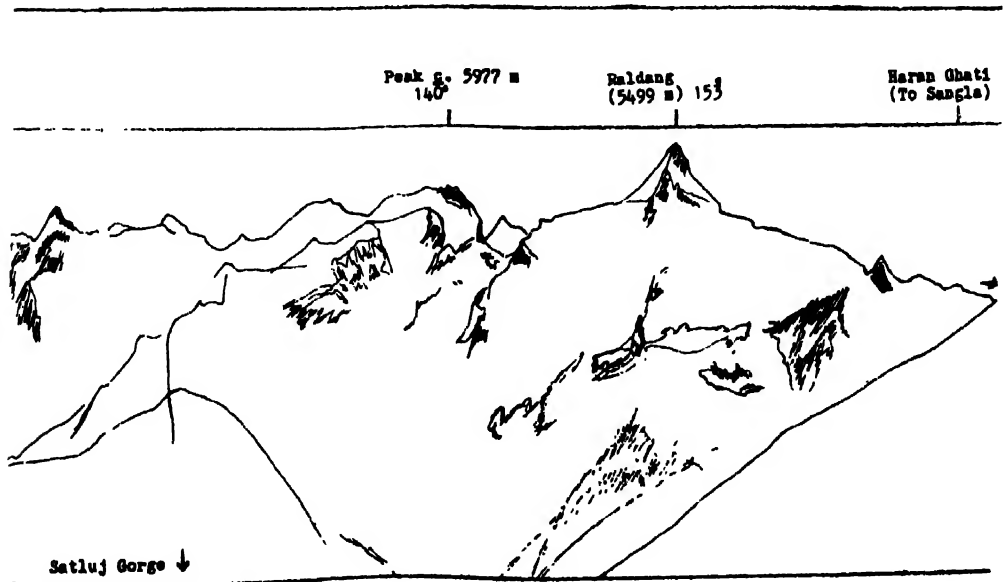
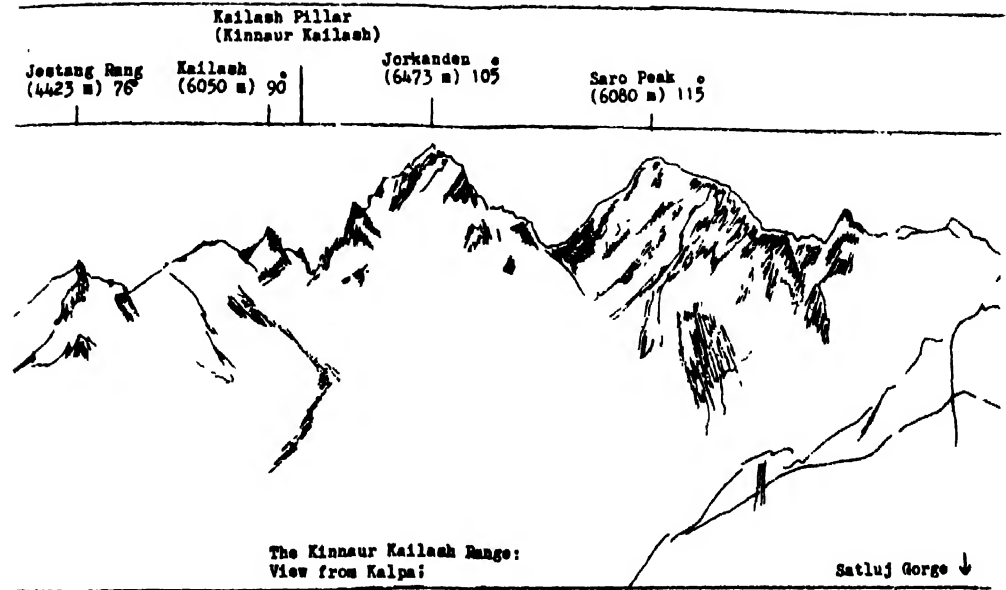
This is the most well-known range in Kinnaur. But perhaps it is the most misunderstood. The locals and maps are very clear that peak Kailash is 6050 m seen near a 'Pillar' from Kalpa. This peak is Kailash and the pillar worshipped as the holy Kinnaur Kailash, being in form of Shivling. The highest peak Jorkanden (6473 m) is to its southeast and is generally confused as Kinnaur-Kailash. The accompanying panorama should clear the nomenclature.

10. *H.J.*, Vol. 36, p. 193.

11. *H.J.*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 55.

12. 'Land The Ogress Stalked: Kinnaur' by D.S. Malik, (*I.T.B.P. Bulletin*, July-Sept. 1975).

13. *H.J.*, Vol. 36, p. 99 and Vol. 42, p. 178.



Kinner-Kailash range from Kalpa.

Jorkanden received various attempts and ascents. After the recce by P.R. Oliver in 1931,¹⁴ it was attempted by the Indian army four times.¹⁵ The first ascent was made in 1974 by I.T.B.P.¹⁶ followed in a month by the army.¹⁷ Since then it has been climbed by the Indian army again on 13 June 1978 led by the late Major Kiran Kumar.¹⁸

Gyamthang valley (Nisang)

An unknown valley to the north of Tirung valley. It leads to Raniso pass (for Tibet) and has one peak of note, 6063 m above Gangchha. On the same ridge further to the east lies Gang Chua (6288 m). It was climbed in 1974 by an army team from the Hojis Lungba valley in the north.¹⁹ The valley is approached from Kanam. To the north of this there are no mountains of great height till Shipki la and the gorge of Satluj and its meeting with the Spiti river north of Puh.

Leo Pargial (Hangrang Valley)

This peak at 6791 m is a high landmark north of Shipki la. Situated on the Tibetan border, it has been an attraction for mountaineers for many years. It was reported to be recce'd by Gerard brothers in 1818 and was first climbed by Marco Pallis and C.E.T. Warren in 1933. It was attempted several times by the army at first, climbed by them in 1967, 1975 and 1980.²⁰ I.T.B.P. made the third ascent in 1971.

The peak was attempted by civilian parties numerous times and climbed twice in 1982.²¹ It had the principal approach from Nako and another was recce'd from Chango.²²

14. *H.J.*, Vol. IV, p. 147.

15. 1964, 1967 and 1972; Major A.B. Jungalwala 1973; Col D.K. Khullar (*H.J.*, Vol. XXXII, p. 105).

16. Led by D.S. Malik; on 26 May 1974.

17. Led by S.S. Kalhan; on 19 June 1974.

18. *Expedition Kinner-Kailash* by Major K.I. Kumar (Vision Books, New Delhi, 1979).

19. *H.J.*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 75.

20. 1967: Col. D.K. Khullar (second ascent).

1975: Brig. J. Singh.

1980: Maj. K.I. Kumar.

21. 1982: P. Dasgupta (Bengal) and U. Sathe (Maharashtra).

22. *H.J.*, Vol. 38, p. 95 and Vol. 39, p. 195.

There are numerous peaks around it from 6173 m to 6816 m (Leo Pargial II). There were discussions about its correct name and height,²³ all laid to rest by the latest Survey of India map (1975) which has adopted the above spelling and height.

Northwest Kinnaur

To the northwest of Satluj, lie the other parts of Kinnaur. The gentle valleys lead to divide with Pin valley (Spiti). It has numerous passes which would afford many pleasurable trekking routes but no climbing higher than about 5900 m. The important passes are as under:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| a) Tari Khango pass : | Bhabha valley to Pin-Parvati pass. |
| b) Larsa Way pass : | Larsa Garang (Taiti Garang)
to Pin valley. |
| c) Ghunsarang pass : | Ropa valley (to northwest)
to Pin valley. |
| d) Manirang pass : | Ropa valley (to north)
to Mane valley. |

The known passes for the trekkers are Tari Khango over which the Indo-New Zealand Himalayan Traverse expedition passed in 1981.²⁴

Historically, Dr J. de V. Graaff reached Manirang pass in 1952 and climbed Manirang peak (6593 m) to its northeast. I.T.B.P. repeated the climb in 1976.²⁵ The only other peaks climbed in the area are Manirang South in 1982²⁶ and 1986²⁷ and an unnamed peak 6223 m to the north of Manirang in 1973.²⁸ There are numerous peaks around 5500 m to 6000 m in the area which have not been touched. It is evident from this brief description, that in Kinnaur many trekking and climbing opportunities await mountaineers. There are many side valleys, peaks and passes which are inviting, unexplored and certainly

23. *H.J.*, Vol. VI, p. 106, Vol. XXVII, pp. 182, 184 and Vol. 38, p. 102.

24. *First Across the Roof of the World* by Graeme Dingle and Peter Hillary (Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1984).

25. *HCNL* 33, p. 27.

26. *HCNL* 36, p. 24.

27. *H.J.*, Vol. 43.

28. *HCNL* 30, p. 13.

unrecorded. With the development of roads, the valleys of this beautiful district are one night away; of course one will have to solve the problem of the inner-line permits, lack of porters and lack of information. But then it is no paradise which is gained easily. Even Kim had to hustle with Hurree babu to gain access here.

Spiti

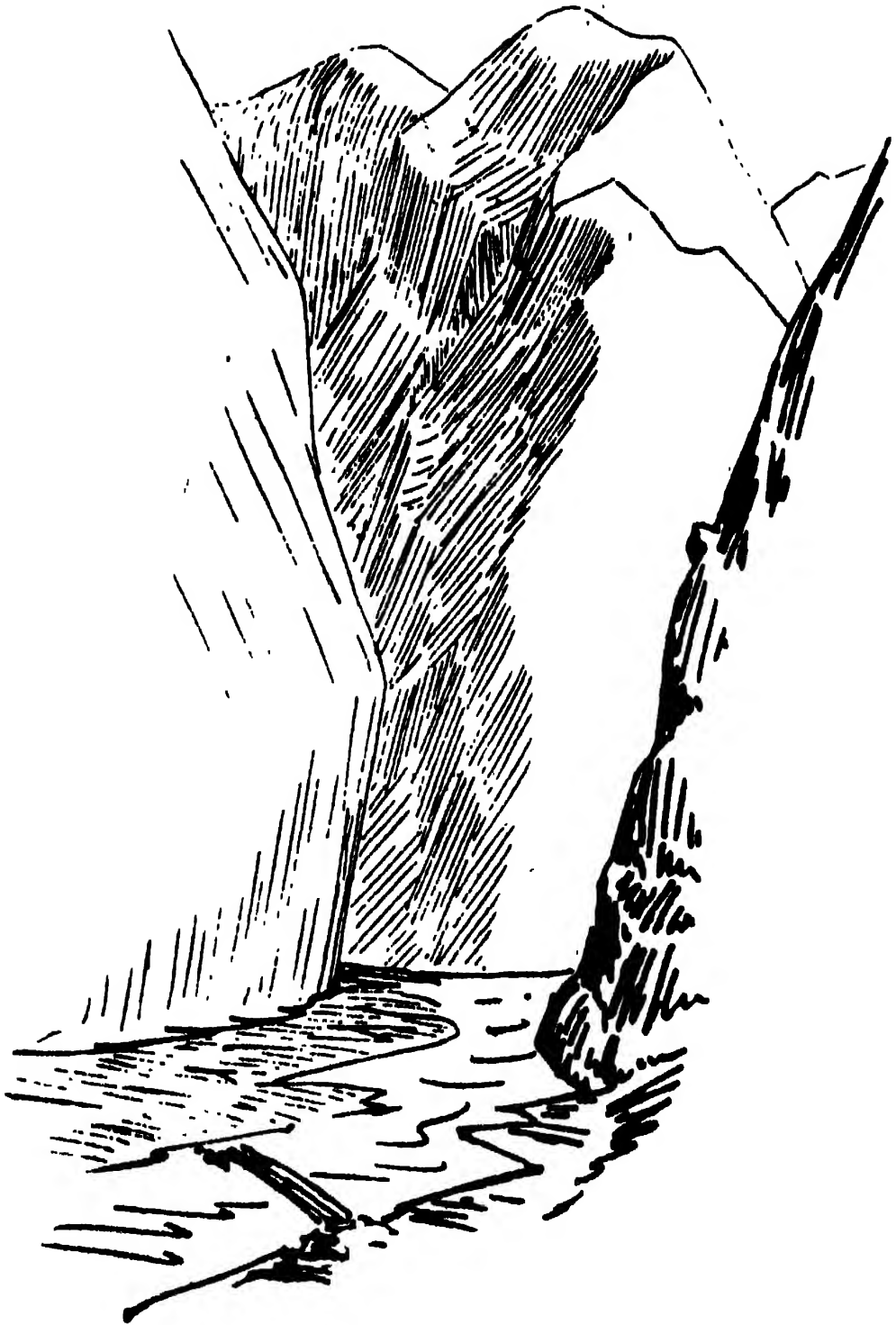
*If you think you are beaten, you are,
If you think you dare not, you don't,
If you like to win, but you think you can't,
It is almost certain you won't.*

*Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man,
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can!*

In 1983, during my first visit to Spiti, I lost my umbrella at Langja village. I was sure it was our guide who had taken it and spread the word around so that he could not use it. I returned there in 1987, descended by a different pass and went straight into the guide's house. He was shocked to see me as if I was a ghost returning from Lingti. I marched out with my umbrella of course.

The Lingti valley was hardest on our shoes. Muslim, Dhiren and myself used up two pairs each. The gravel, scree and the river crossings took a heavy toll. But the unvisited Lingti valley revealed all its secrets. In two long trips we could unveil it. Such a small three member trip, well supported by our trusted Kumaoni porters and with exploratory climbs, is something I cherish.

My only complaint against Spiti and the Lingti valley is that it has not allowed us to reach even the base of its prized objective, Gya—yet.



19

Spiti—Where Two Worlds Meet

The Decennial Expedition to Lingti Valley

1983

WE MUST have looked a helpless lot. Sitting there near a small broken bridge with all our luggage we hardly looked like a team going on an expedition. A bus had deposited us here and we had to wait for some mode of transport from the other side. At last an army truck arrived. All of us, our luggage and many other passengers clambered in. The Subedar-major in charge was furious.

‘Get down all of you. Or else I’ll have your luggage thrown in the Sutlej.’

Reluctantly we all clambered down. At the same time Shekhar who is a Flight-lieutenant with the Indian Air Force introduced himself to the Subedar-major. Magic worked. He saluted with respect, ‘Sir, you come in the front’, and with a filthy glance to us added, ‘and ask your porters to get in’. We all saluted *Shekharsab* and clambered up again. Thus we had to manoeuvre many times but we were always on the move to Spiti.

But in a way we were lucky. The early travellers had to walk all the way. We had a bus ride from Simla to Rampur-Bushair and now along Sutlej across Kinnaur. We passed Khab where we left Sutlej, to Sumdo where Parang Chu re-enters India and meets the Spiti river. Technically we enter Spiti at Sumdo. The road climbed up ‘Koh Loops’ to reach Yangthang and we were in the barren Trans-Himalaya. Everything happened suddenly. The next day we were at Tabo. Here almost the total population of Spiti was camping to have a *darshan* of the Dalai Lama. The old monastery was deserted and a new one constructed like most of the Spiti monasteries. In 1975 a giant earthquake had caused wide-scale destruction.

Tabo nala, 2 km ahead, was flooded and we had to tranship our luggage once again. By evening we sat on a loaded bus with three times the number of passengers allowed. All of us were depressed and surrendering to a change of plans. But Muslim stood firm amidst the ruins. 'A bloody bus ride is not going to decide which mountain we are going to climb', he quipped.

By late evening the police had to be called in. They emptied the bus by force and filled it up again with the same number! But now it was done in an orderly manner and with those favoured, including us. At about 10 p.m. we started on our last journey. We hoped that it was not so in the most literal sense. The road was bad, bus in poor condition and it required great patience to tolerate those ladies of Spiti who chattered loudly next to us. Anyway at mid-night we were deposited at Lingti village (3460 m) our road-head, having covered 394 km from Shimla. The next day was spent resting, arranging *khotas* (donkeys) and yaks to carry our luggage.

A Peep into History

Lingti valley which we were about to penetrate had no history of any visitors. There are no passes leading to Tibet from the valley. One pass in the east led to Giu nala and Tabo. Other, Chaksachan la in the northwest, led to Ladakh. On the north is Rupshu district of Ladakh, on the east is Tibet, west Kulu and in the south Kinnaur. At Spiti the Tibetan and Indian worlds met for centuries. Now a motorable road connects Kaja to Shimla and Manali (over Kumzum la and Rohthang pass) with a daily bus service for 8 months in the year.

Two of the earliest known travellers to Spiti were Captain Alexander Gerard and Dr. J.G. Gerard. They explored 'Bashair, Spiti and Kanwar' (Kinnaur) in 1817 (*Abode of Snow*, p. 68). The other visitors were H. Paidar and Ludwig Schmaderer in 1945, who escaped from Tibet.

'In July 1945 when still wandering aimlessly and not knowing that war was over, L. Schmaderer was brutally robbed and murdered at or near the little village of Tabo in Spiti. H. Paider returned to Poo on the Sutlej and followed the river down to Saharan where he gave himself up and made a full report to the police. The murderers were arrested.' (*Abode of Snow*, p. 286). It was after 40 years that such a crime

was committed at all in Spiti (for details see *H.J.*, Vol. XV, p. 69).

Parang la, an important pass which led from Spiti to Rupshu, was crossed by Europeans. (*H.J.*, Vol. I, p. 77 and Vol. VIII, p. 118).

The first climber in the area was J.O.M. Roberts in 1939. He climbed Chau Chau Kang Nilda (Guan Nelda) (6303 m) (*H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 129). J. de.V. Graaff and K.E. Snelson recceeded peaks in 1952, while P.F. Holmes and T.H. Braham made a number of fine ascents in Ratang nala and of Chau Chau Kang Nilda (CCKN).¹ Indian expeditions climbed Shilla, CCKN and Kanikma² in 1966 and again CCKN in 1981.³ Thus for a wide valley such as Spiti, a lot of climbing and exploration is still left for the future and we were to tackle one valley out of the many.

Historically the peak Shilla had attracted plenty of attention due to a wrongly attributed height, which now is firmly settled (see note at the end).

An advance party of ours, consisting of two members, had visited Lingti valley between 25 May and 20 June 1983. They trekked in for 4 days and climbed the 5700 m peak, 'Sibu'. The information and photographs they brought back were useful. One of the members had also trekked towards Parang la (5578 m) though he missed reaching it by a few hundred feet due to the bad snow conditions.

Slowly up the Lingti (27 July 1983)

It was drizzling when our *Khotas* arrived to carry the luggage to Lalung. We passed Rama and reached Lalung (3658 m) comfortably in 4 hrs (14 km). We trooped into the local Pradhan's house and requested him for a room to stay. The lady of the house seemed rather reluctant to oblige. As it was just the first day's trek we looked clean and welcome without beards. But she had four pretty daughters, so we understood her reluctance! Instead she arranged our stay in another house with less wholesome company—bugs! It was a terrible night and even dreams of those four lovely damsels could not console us.

We met Dr. Bhargav of the Geological Survey of India. He

1. *H.J.*, Vol. XX, p. 78.

2. *H.J.*, Vol. XVII, p. 185.

3. *H.J.*, Vol. 39, p. 198.

Also see *Himalayan Odyssey* by Trevor Braham, p. 97.

enlightened us about the geology of the area. Lalung system in the Lingti valley is almost a complete 'library' of geology. It is well preserved with its volumes intact. It covers about 250 million years of geological history. Nowhere can one find specimens so easily. Of course research has already been undertaken by earlier expeditions on Spiti shales and fossils which are well known all over the world. Perhaps the largest collection of ammonites and belemnites at present is at Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge, collected in 1955 by Dr. Richard Hey. A little west of Kaja lies Kyoto which is well known for its limestone. Now the mines there are exhausted but the brand name remains. All agencies are active here to investigate the different aspects of Spiti.

Among others we met a party from the Botanical Survey of India. According to them the plants and many species in Spiti have travelled from Tibet and Central Asia. Particularly the crops here are of very high-yielding variety. This allows the population to subsist despite the short period of cultivation and poor farming methods. Their study was to transplant, if possible, these varieties to the Indian plains. If successful it will be most beneficial. Many irrigation canals now feed every village. Some canals, like one above Langia, start almost from the glacier. This with plantation of poplar trees has given Spiti a much greener look. Road-building activity is also in full swing. Apart from the main artery road, many side valleys like Pin, Shilla, Ratang or our Lingti have a road connection. To our surprise the post is still carried by mules and runners once it enters Spiti at Sumdo, though telegrams reach Simla within hours. Amongst all these invasions of modernity Spitians carry on their traditional living, face the winter and carry on trade with the plains instead of the Tibetan highlands. They have a lot to offer just as they gain a lot.

We looked around the village next morning. People were very friendly. They all seemed well content and self-sufficient. They arranged yaks for our journey ahead. It was raining heavily on the 28th also. Alexander Cunningham in his book *Ladakh* includes Spiti and writes that rainfall is scarce and rarely above 4 inches in a year in these Trans-Himalayan areas. All of it seems to be falling on one day! We spent the morning visiting Lalung gompa. It was ancient with many unusual frescoes and a beautiful location. The lama was informative. There are 5 major monasteries in Spiti. Tabo, Dankhar, Ki, Pin and Tanghut. Moreover most villages have their own gompa. Lamaism is still practised but the gompas have far less control than

the government officials over the villagers. This was purposely achieved simply by withholding any assistance to the monasteries and to the lamas. Every family still sends a child to become a lama but now he can return to work as often as required and many leave the monastic life without much fuss. Some elderly lamas had stayed in Lhasa for education. Most of the present lot has travelled in South India to the Tibetan settlements. They are educated in modern schools or at Dharamsala. Religion is no longer an absolute way of life here, for locals or for the lamas as in the past.

As the rain did not abate by afternoon we left with our porters to camp at Upper Zingu (4330 m—8 km). The next day we crossed Zingu top (4390 m) and entered the Lingti gorge. It was a torturous place to be in. Boga and I pushed ahead on a scree slope. From a distance no route seemed possible. But it solved itself over the boulders and the scree was remarkably firm. 'How in all these immortal cliffs do we ordinary mortals dare to travel? It surely comes from within', opined Boga, our official philosopher. After a camp in the gorge we reached Shijbang pass (4815 m). From the pass we had the first view of Gya (6794 m). It looked lovely and serene. It was at the junction of Ladakh, Tibet and Spiti. After the latest survey Gya is the highest point in Spiti. The gorges leading to its base seemed very formidable. But once at its base, it should offer a good climb.

On the 31st we waited for the yaks to catch up. Bhupesh attempted Shijbang peak c. 5242 m and came within 60 m of the summit before retreating. But the rest did not help Gaurang. He felt too sick to continue and had to be sent back.

Around Shijbang were two magnificent rocky towers, both nearing 6100 m. One towards Lalung was locally called 'Chokula' and the other 'Cholung', both names of local gods with a legend attached to them.

From Shijbang ('grassy land'—which it was) we descended to Shijbang nala and climbed up to Sanesa ('where the grass grows'). Traversing high over Sibu we went down again to cross Sheru nala. There were two routes from here. One was to cross the Lingti river to Lashitanga and go over Chaksachan la to the base of Gya. Or proceed up to Detto-Numa in the east above us and then follow the Tangmor gorge to the Lingti river and proceed along it. We selected the latter as it gave us a chance to attempt the other peaks and it was nearer.

On 2 August we were deposited at our base camp (4880 m). A strong hail-storm and wind lashed us that evening. That night it was

cold. We could hear the sounds of our Garhwali porters singing to ward off the strong Trans-Himalayan wind and cold. They were old companions. It was strange for them to see the barrenness and the Buddhist culture but they adapted well. It was fortuitous that we had them along. A man of Spiti is a poor load-carrier and considers it below his dignity. Even when he agrees, his charges are heavy and he is most troublesome. On 3-4 August we recceeded and moved to ABC. Boga who had been unwell for some time had to be sent home as his condition further deteriorated. Thus the Trans-Himalayan inhospitable terrain had seriously depleted our strength.

5 August brought us our first peak. In two ropes we climbed Lagma (5761 m). It was an easy climb with a fabulous view from the top. From the summit we could see Handgumpa, a peak in Tibet. As the legend goes it had a gumpa on its top and a lama climbed up to worship. We also observed that the best route to the base of Gya may be along the Lingti river itself as followed by a Survey party. The peaks of Parkyocula also looked impressive.

Gorgeous Mistake

On 6 August, Muslim, Sher Singh and myself descended into the Tangmor gorge to try and find out an exit to Lingti. We went down 760 m and proceeded for 6 km. We soon knew that it was a gorgeous mistake. The gorge narrowed with cliffs on both sides. We were stopped by rock-walls. After trying a few false leads we had to retrace our steps and climb up all the way back to ABC. However, it confirmed that there is no route to Gya from this side of the Lingti river.

On 8 August all of us left to attempt the peak Tangmor (5900 m). After an initial push a corniced ridge which offered no protection stopped us. We retreated to ABC. With this we decided to withdraw from Lingti and retraced our route to Lalung over the gorge. Our stay in Lingti was brief but we had penetrated 3/4th way up and photographed all the upper reaches. Plenty of climbing around here for the future.

From Lalung we made a small foray to Dankhar gumpa. The old gumpa was magnificently perched on a hillock. But now it has been reconstructed a short distance away on flat ground, far less dramatic but safer. We went down to Sichling and took a lift in a lorry to arrive at Kaja, the capital of Spiti, at midnight.

World of Spiti

Kaja is a small town in a way. The local population of about 200 is supplemented by administrative and defence staff of 2000. It is situated on a huge plain on the bank of Spiti river and strong winds make it a very cold place. The small bazar has few things to offer. And surprise of surprises—it has two video theatres showing the latest movies! It gives you a queer feeling to watch a movie extravaganza sitting with simple Pitoons. Little ahead near Rangrik village a giant hydro-electric project is being constructed in the Ratang valley. While Holmes and Braham had great difficulty in penetrating its gorge in 1955, a 10 km motorable road is blasted out and giant trucks ply on the Spiti and Ratang river-beds.

In this book⁴ Peter Holmes had mentioned Shiring Dawa, a young boy who had revolted against the monastic life. He had great hopes from this boy and wrote:

‘The best hope for Spiti to progress though not, one’ hopes, towards Indianization, a concept as ugly as the word—seems to lie with one such as Shiring Dawa. If he is adequately trained, now before he is any older, there is no saying what changes he might accomplish for the good of his people, with the benevolent support of Delhi. He alone among the Pitoons has the ability to cope with the advances which must surely come one day.

There is a Tibetan saying which warns of the strife and unhappiness which comes with the foreigner. Modern ways are seldom conducive to peace. But with Shiring to show the way there would be a hope that the contagious happiness which characterizes the Pitoon of today, and which we were lucky enough to experience, would not be lost. (p. 174).

We were curious to find out what happened to him, after 28 years. He had taken up employment in P.W.D. as a storekeeper. He embezzled funds and was prosecuted. His Kaja house was taken away. He limped due to a fall and had hit the bottle hard. In June 1983 he

4. *Mountains and a Monastery* by Peter Holmes (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1958).

died with a most infamous reputation as a lame drunkard. A sad end which perhaps illustrates how difficult it is to go against tradition. The present-day 'Dawas' go to school, almost all speak Hindi, and ultimately get employed in the plains or in government agencies in Spiti.

Holmes had remarked, among other things, about the impossibility of roads to Spiti. I don't blame him looking at the terrain. But they are there all right, however bad in condition. Holmes wrote:

The proposed jeep track from Manali to the frontier, were it possible, would more than anything serve to establish a lasting bond between India and Spiti. But it is almost certainly a too ambitious scheme. When we first walked into Spiti the project seemed well on its way to completion. A year later, of the thirty miles of jeep track, so laboriously hewn out of the mountainside, barely a trace could be seen. Winter had done its devastating worst.

Climbs in Shilla Nala

After a rest of a few days we were ready for the second part of the expedition. On 14 August 1983 all of us started for Langja (4560 m—15 km), a small beautiful village with CCKN rising beautifully in the backdrop. Ladies offered flowers to welcome us but immediately spoiled it by asking for baksheesh.

We made two teams here. Arun and Muslim were to attempt CCKN. The SW ridge by which it was always previously climbed dropped steeply towards us. Harish, Bhupesh and Gaurang were to investigate the route to Shilla and climb peaks near Shilla jot.

While CCKN party left next day, we went out to search for a guide. The only person who could guide us was at Tanghut gompa 4 km away for a meeting. We visited the gompa and with intervention of Rimpoche arranged for our man to be released. Near the gompa we saw the ritual of 'Yada-Tada'. To cure the sick or to commemorate the recent dead they offer rice and tsampa in a peculiar ceremony. Now rich Pitoons who can afford to pay for wood cremate the dead while others still follow the ancient tradition of hacking corpses to pieces to offer them to the vultures. We saw quite a few Lungthars-cairns for the dead.

Our guide arrived and we left on the 16th for the pass. The guide pointed out the pass from a distance and departed taking with him my umbrella in the bargain! After a camp we reached Shilla jot (5670 m) and stayed 150 m on the Langja side. It led on the other side to Syarna nala in the Lingti valley. After a long descent and traverse, which may take 2 days, it led to the base of Shilla. From here Shilla was a gentle climb. Thus one can approach Shilla easily from Lashitanga in the Lingti valley. There is no easy approach from the west through the Shilla nala. Did the Survey *Khalasi* traverse all these complications alone in 1860?

18 August was our 'D' day. Three of us left late at 0800 hrs to allow the bad weather to clear. We reached a col at 5490 m. First we traversed to the west to climb 'Zumto', c. 5800 m, our first peak in the valley. By 1215 hrs we were back at the col. Gaurang rappelled down to the camp while Bhupesh and I waited for the bad weather to clear. 'Someone up there is unable to decide about the weather', said Bhupesh. However, we lost patience and decided to climb 'Tserip', c. 5980 m, regardless. We climbed a 60 m gendarme and proceeded along the ridge to reach the top by 1330 hrs. The weather was cloudy but still holding on, so we continued and descended 300 m to traverse the peak. A gentle climb led us to the top of our third peak 'Kawu', c. 5910 m, at 1530 hrs. By this time the weather was closing in with sharp hail. Someone up there had made up His mind and it was time to descend. We completed our high 4 km traverse to Shilla jot, c. 5670 m, and reached the camp by late evening, dehydrated, tired but satisfied.

The CCKN team had run into difficulties. It is surprising how every team (since 1939) that attempted CCKN always had bad weather. This is in confirmation of the local legend. They established one high camp at 5780 m. Despite two separate attempts they failed.

We all gathered at Kaja on 20 August. It was time to say goodbye to this world of Spiti. A spectacular bus ride led us through the western Spiti panorama to Kunzum la (4550 m). Travelling along the Chandra river in Lahul, the bus steadily climbed up to Rohthang pass (3978 m). On the pass a huge icy patch was cleared by bulldozers and the bus tilted dangerously to one side. Though scared someone murmured: '*Jane do* (let it go). As long as there is a road, who's afraid of the Spiti roads!' The bus slowly rolled down to Manali and the plains. We were back to the other world, our world.

Note on Shilla

This small peak on the divide between Lingti and Shilla nala became so famous that any mention of Spiti led to the memory of Shilla and vice versa.

It was first reported to have been climbed in 1860 by an unnamed *Khalasi* of the Survey of India, who erected a pole on the top. This was reported in 'The Synoptical Volume XXXV of the Trigonometrical Survey of India' published in 1910. It was referred to as peak 'Parang la No. 2' and later the name was changed to Shilla in the Survey Office. The peak appears as 'Parang la No. 2 S' with the height of 23,064 ft on SOI Sheet 64 SW, published in August 1874 (Gya is mentioned as 'GUA Snowy Peak, 22,309 ft on the same sheet). Thus Shilla remained a dubious altitude record for 47 years till Dr. Longstaff climbed Trisul, 23,360 ft, in 1907.

First visitors to Spiti had doubts about its height. In 1952 Snelson and de Graaff felt that it was a much smaller peak and a high peak was observed to its NE. Holmes and Braham felt the same. A letter in *H.J.*, Vol. XXVI, p. 169 established its height at 20,050 ft. Now on the latest maps with modern methods of survey the height of Shilla is firmly established as 6132 m (20,120 ft) and Gya lost only 18 ft! One wonders where the SOI went wrong.

The Indian expedition which climbed Shilla in 1966 did not find any survey pole (but who expects it there after 106 years!) and they questioned why the climb done in 1860 was reported after 50 years (1910) by the Synoptical Volume. Did the *Khalasi* really climb it or is it a legend?

In Spiti we found that more than any other peak Shilla is the most known point to the locals. Almost every lama and villager seems to know of it, however far away. They associate it with a place for the dead leading to heaven and still believe that it is the highest point in Spiti and Ladakh from which one can see heaven. It has a legendary air built around it. No one, the most elderly lama included, seems to be aware of the ascent by a *Khalasi*, to confirm or deny it. And very few villagers in Langja knew about the route to it. Anyway according to them it is still the highest and a virgin. The Shilla legend is here to stay.

Nomenclature in Spiti

When we started planning for an expedition to Spiti all the names



Parlungbi.

sounded strange and meaningless. But we knew that the Pitoon language is similar to Tibetan and all the nomenclature may be based on Tibetan. Hence a list of names was sent to our friend Dorjee Lhatoo at Darjeeling. He consulted Tibetan scholars and sent us a list of interpretations. Tibetan is more of a spoken language and here we were offering names in English to interpret. Hence they suggested various meanings. In each case amazingly at least one of them was most appropriate. It may be noted that those scholars in far away Darjeeling did not know whether the words we sent were names of peaks, people, passes, valleys, villages or areas, let alone that they are about Spiti. But the fact that the meanings they suggested are still the most appropriate and agree with local interpretations confirm that the nomenclature of Himalayan region far and wide is a serious business. The locals may be illiterate but they are scholars about their areas and the early surveyors have taken this fact into consideration.

Some names were associated with local stories and legends (Syarma nala). We tried to gather the same. However, Himalayan nomenclature can be a serious study by itself as it combines many factors like language, location, local legends, beliefs, religion (Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim) and many others. Given below are the meanings of names around the area in which we operated.

Spiti:	The middle country (between India and China).
Shilla:	<i>Shi</i> = death. <i>Shi-la</i> = range or peak death. We could not understand what relation it has with the dead. But other meanings locally offered were 'a place of monastery' or 'a gateway to heaven'.
Chau Chau Kang Nilda:	<i>Chau Chau</i> = Cone-shaped. <i>Nilda</i> = moon. This is a conical peak above Langja isolated and rising like a 'moon in the sky'.
Gya:	Vast, great, widespread. The most prominent usages of the word are: <i>Gyanak</i> = China, <i>Gyami</i> = Chinese, <i>Gya</i> = India, <i>Gyagar</i> = Indian. This is a vast flat peak where very prominently Indian and Chinese borders meet. In fact knowing the meaning one can easily identify the peak and not confuse it with a nearby high rocky peak.
Parilungbi:	<i>Pa</i> = there. <i>Ri</i> = range or hill. <i>Lungbi</i> = that country. 'A mountain in other country'. This is the first peak

in Ladakh as seen from Spiti.

- Parang La: It may be 'Purang La' in the original. This is a name commonly given to a trade post in Tibet. It is said that after the Anglo-Tibet war such trade posts where the merchandise of both countries were bartered were established on the borders of Tibet and India. This is a pass which led from Kibar in Spiti to Chumar and Hanle in Ladakh where regular trading with Tibetans was carried on.
- Kanamo: This white peak towers over Ki gompa, the holiest in Spiti. *Ka* = white or auspicious word of a high Lama. *Namo* = hostess, a lady. So either it is 'mountain of good omen' or simply a 'white hostess'.
- Syarma nala: A large side valley in Lingti. It has plenty of juniper shrubs, a rarity in Spiti. *Syarma* = blind. As the legend goes a woodcutter by accident was pierced by juniper in his eyes and went blind. Hence the name.
- Lingti: Literally it translates as 'the stone out of which the instrument to cut objects is made'. The river has cut sharply through a rocky-gorge and it has plenty of sharp stones, unlike the adjoining valley which has more scree.
- Handgompa: 'Gompa on the top.' A flat topped shapely peak with a legend to match.
- Zumto: 'Talkative'. The peak borders the highest villages in Lingti and Shilla nala. You can talk to both the villages.
- Tscrip: 'Quiet'.
- Kawu: 'Strong'. Both peaks are situated on way to Shilla and on the same ridge as Chau Chau Kang Nilda. One has to be 'quiet' as moon and 'strong' to attain heaven from Shilla.
- Parchokula: A tributary stream feeding Lingti. It literally means 'God of water'.
- Tangmor: 'A deep gorge', which it was.
- Gyagar: Indian.

Runse:	A famous monastery.
Geling:	Piped instrument of lama.
Gyadung:	Long trumpet of lama-band.
Yangzi Diwan:	A new pass.
Lama kyent:	Monk's village. (For many peaks on the ridge).
Lhakhang:	God's house.
Labrang:	Lama's house. (Both near Shilla, 'the place of monastery').
Goor:	A disciple through whom a local deity manifests. (The peak led to Gyagar).

20

A Return to Lingti

1987

RETURNING TO an area of past exploits is like re-kindling an old love affair. You have the knowledge and the experience but are still unsure whether all the excitement and expectations of the first time will ever be repeated. But this is all the excuse one needs to fall in love again with the old memories, pictures, peaks and people.

Three of us, who ultimately made it, were old hands at Spiti. Muslim and I had climbed in the Lingti valley in 1983.¹ The deep gorge and lack of proper logistic support stopped us at the half way mark. Dhiren had missed the trip though he had been part of the Spiti dream till the last. Now with this return trip, his attraction for Spiti stood vindicated, just as ours was reconfirmed. Ravi accompanied us during the initial trek and made every meal a healthy eating competition. Our four old Kumaoni porters were back too.

The bus journey to Kaja (3600 m) was completed with the usual hardships after the inner line permits were obtained at Shimla. We visited Dankhar and Ki monasteries, and were immediately greeted by the change. A lama passed us by on a battered cycle, a great achievement for an area which had missed the wheel revolution till almost 25 years ago (except the prayer wheel of course). We inquired about the Rimpoche (head lama) from a meditating priest. He pointed a finger upwards. Looking at our solemn faces about to offer condolences, he spat out a chewing gum which was helping him to concentrate and quickly stated, 'He has gone to Japan'. That was our reintroduction to Spiti, Japan was replacing heaven, there were buses and roads everywhere, electricity and supplies in plenty. Tons of wood stored in

1. Refer to *H.J.*, Vol. 40, p. 96 for full details.

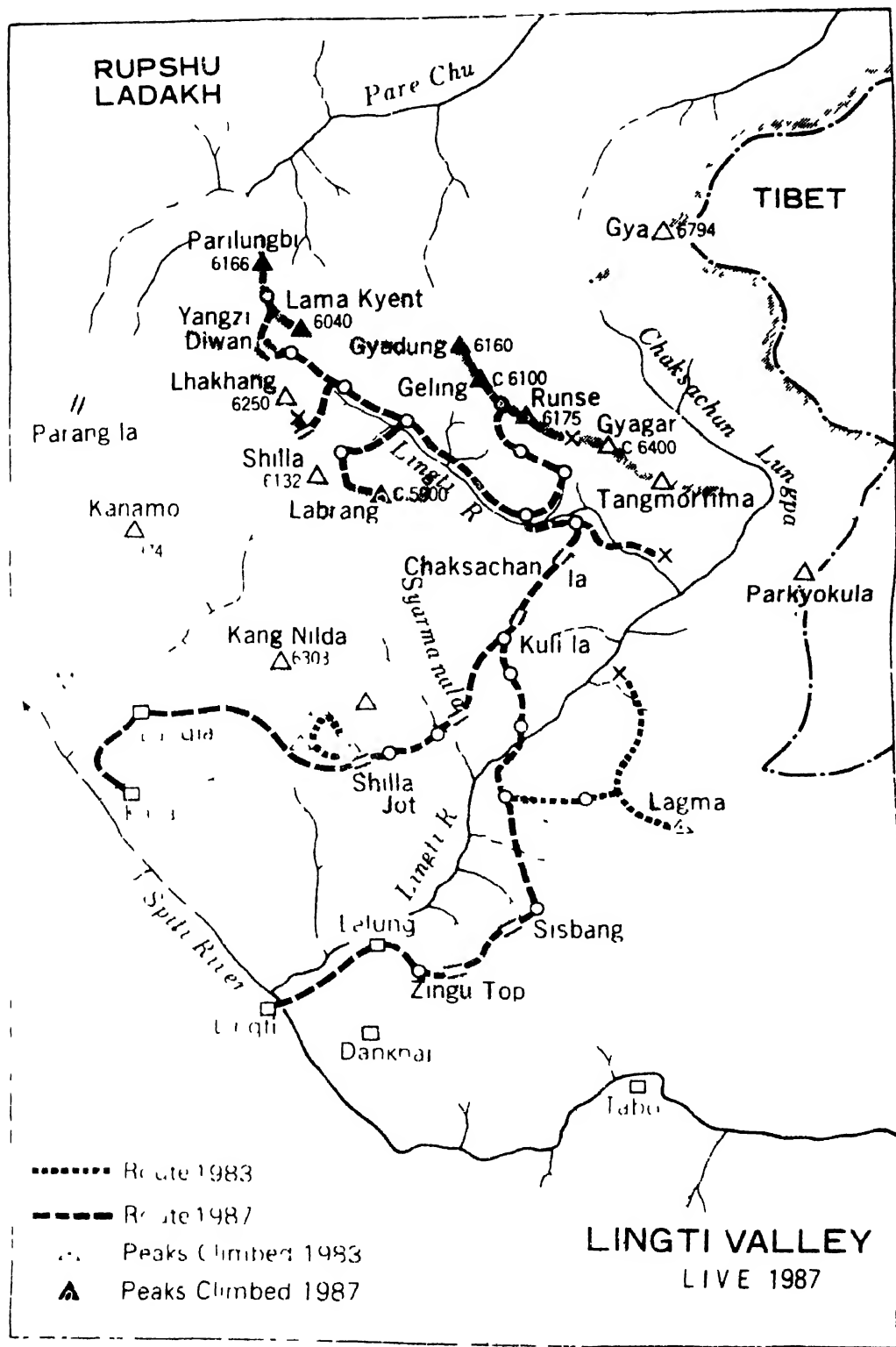
summer by the Commissioner are distributed in winter; solar energy is harnessed for daily use, monasteries are well supplied, movie shows and travel have changed life styles. The Ladarsa 'mela' has been revived. For many years a fair used to be held at Ladarsa (near Kibar) where traders from Rupshu and Kulu gathered to barter goods with the Spitians. Now the fair is to buy modern goods from Kulu and traditional items of Spiti. Some of the old values still remain. Village laws rule and religious ceremonies are a way of life. But for how long, one wonders. There is talk of a helicopter service for the tourists (Heavens forbid) and even some small industry. But as Spitians themselves would say: 'Flow with the river, don't try to swim. If you swim you get tired.'

Back to Lingti

Lingti is the unknown valley in eastern Spiti. As there are no known passes at its head, locals don't venture beyond Chaksachan la, which is the last grazing point. From Lalung, it follows in a northeastern direction till its junction with Chaksachan lungpa river. From here it takes a sharp turn to the northwest up to the watershed with Ladakh. A high pass ('Yangzi Diwan') leads across to Rupshu to join the trade route from Parang la (5800 m). In the distant past Yangzi Diwan may have been in use, but no one seems to remember it, particularly as the Spitian is neither a trader nor a traveller, and Parang la was always more popular. On the eastern rim of Lingti, high peaks of the Parkyokula range rise up to 6526 m, effectively blocking off Tibet (Pare Chu valley). Gya (6794 m) is at the head of this valley, at the important trijunction of Spiti, Rupshu and Tibet. No one seems to have heard of Gya or acknowledged it as the highest peak in Spiti. We intended to investigate the approaches to it, photograph it and establish the glory due to it.

The upper Lingti has side valleys, each with many peaks. On the north the major valley is that of 'Gyagar'. On the south lies Chaksachan la and the 'Labrang', and 'Lhakhang' nalas which pave the way to high areas.

We were back at Lalung village, our entrance to Lingti. This year the yakwalas fleeced us charging almost double the previous rates. We had a 9-day journey over a known route. They agreed to take us up to Chaksachan la (5230 m). Beyond that they had no knowledge of anyone having gone and would not venture. From 17 June, we followed the route over the Sisbang pass to Sheru and down to Phiphuk,



as we had done in 1983. We settled down to a routine, a late start after the yaks were gathered, reined and loaded. It was instructive. This sturdy animal takes a long time to be gathered, shooed and pampered. But once the string attached to the nostril is caught, it resigns itself to its fate and carries for the day without any more trouble.

We went over rough terrain, absorbing lovely scenery. From Phiphuk (4005 m) started our new venture on 22 June. Initially in two days the route went up to Lakshitang (4560 m), Shelatse (4800 m), over the Kuli la (4880 m) to Shaktijung (4530 m). On the final day the route climbed up steeply to a high notch on a ridge which they call Chaksachan la (5230 m). We were deposited here in front of a great view.

We surveyed the scene. 'Gyagar' (c. 6400 m) with all the peaks on the high ridge was opposite us. Below was the Lingti river. Since Phiphuk, where we had crossed the river, it took a sharp northwesterly turn. At this turn Chaksachan lungpa came in from the northeast. It was evident that Gya (6794 m) was very far away from us, and the only way to it was to go down the Lingti to the junction with Chaksachan lungpa and then go up along the latter valley. This was our first objective. We had to ferry all our luggage 1000 m down for 3 days into the valley and camped on its bank. We called it 'the cantonment'. A lovely glen with plenty of juniper. After a rest and a bath we were ready for our first failure. It was 29 June.

Going down the Lingti for 4 km, we realised its difficulties. We had to wade across four times, having to climb up the adjoining steep scree slopes twice. At the end of it we ran into a gorge where true to its name Lingti ('an instrument that cuts rocks') cuts through steep walls on both sides. It was possible to go ahead only in winter or in early summer, but then the passes would be blocked lower down at that time. This was the problem of the approach to Gya, which we had to leave for a team with a year in hand!

Returning to 'the cantonment', we decided that what could not go down, should go up. For the next 3 days we went up the Lingti to its head bordering on Ladakh. A most beautiful and difficult valley unfolded. The gorge was narrow but luckily always allowed us a passage. Crossings were frequent. By now we had settled down to a routine for the crossings. The spot was decided after observations, one of us would probe and go across with a rope tied. Once the rope was fixed across, we went in turns carrying light loads and making ferries to and fro. At some places where the river was too wide, it had to be

done in batches, with belays from both sides moving up and down. It was not possible to cross after midday and as the days passed by, each crossing required more time and expertise, the last one being almost disastrous. In the unknown Trans-Himalayan areas these river-crossings are a challenging aspect of the trip, and assume as much importance as climbing a peak. We did about 15 major crossings, and had to be very careful to remain unscathed.

Climbs in the Upper Valley

We established a camp at the junction of Lhakhang nala on 3 July. Muslim left with Harsinh (jr.) to climb Lhakhang (6250 m), a shapely dome. In two days they were established at a 5900 m col between the peak and Shilla. Next day the 6th, as they went up the porter complained of headache and a frustrated Muslim had to return. We did not divide ourselves after this.

Dhiren and I had left with Balamsinh for Yangzi Diwan (5890 m) on 4 July. We had to negotiate a minor glacier and ice-walls up to the high ridge at 6000 m. 'Lama Kyent' (6040 m) was next to the col and was climbed, offering a fine view. Many peaks stood on the same ridge, giving an appearance of a 'village' full of peaks.² We crossed the watershed and descended to Rupshu. This was a high camp at 6000 m above the pass. Parilungbi (6166 m) was in front of us. It was separated from Lama Kyent ridge by the Yangzi Diwan pass and was standing aloof in Rupshu. At its foot Parang la trade route passed by and on its two sides the valleys dropped towards the trade route.

On the 6th, we descended 250 m to the pass and climbed unroped on the south ridge. It was very steep scree with gendarmes which we had to bypass. By 9.50 a.m. we were on the summit of Parilungbi—marked by a survey cairn and a pole. The survey party must have climbed here from Rupshu as it was standing on the trade route. It was called 'Parang la Station No. 1' but we could not ascertain the year of ascent.

We spent a delightful hour on the top. The view extended right across the Rupshu plain till Tso Morari lake and Demchok in the north. Nearby towards the northwest were Parang la and unnamed peaks of 6364 m and 6343 m. On the northeast were very high peaks of 6623 m and 6642 m. We almost mistook one of them for the elusive Gya, which was in the distance. On the south Lhakhang, Shilla

2. For explanation of names, see note at the end of this chapter.



Gyagar ridge peaks.

and the Lingti completed the circle. The visual and intellectual delight in solving the panorama was just as great as the physical pleasure in climbing to it. What forbidding terrain lay ahead. We had spent hours studying the maps and dreaming as to how it would look from up there. Almost like the dream of the poem *Kubla Khan* fulfilled and confirming the topography.

Back to reality and in Lingti valley we were united with Muslim at the upper base on the 7th. We withdrew one valley camp to enter the Labrang nala. Shilla (6132 m) was our next aim. This famous peak had aroused attention to Spiti by its wrongly given height.³ It was called 'Parang la Station No. 2' and with Parilungbi played an important role in the survey. On its south lay Syarma nala, but we were approaching it from the east through the Labrang nala. We quickly went up the valley in 2 days to establish ourselves at the foot of the northern ridge on 10 July. It was corniced and may possibly allow access only with great difficulty. The next day I staggered on the slopes due to a late dose of Valium. Muslim and Dhiren continued, reaching within striking distance of the north col. But the ridge they saw ahead was sharp and certainly not easy. Our hopes of trooping up the 20' slope with a flag-pole, like the unnamed khalasi in 1860 evaporated.

The next day (12 July) we decided to attempt it from the east col. Last year an Indian team had reached the summit via this route.⁴ They had come up from Syarma nala while we climbed the slopes from the east. From the col we could see that the ridge was full of gendarnes and cornices. The true peak lay over the subsidiary hump. The time to climb Shilla easily is after the disappearance of snow and on the summer scree. We proceeded south to climb 'Labrang' (c. 5900 m). It gave us a good ridge walk and an excellent view all around.

By this time Muslim had run short of tobacco for his pipe. He put his foot down for a refill in the true Shiptonian fashion. That was all the excuse we needed and we were quickly down to 'the cantonment' again on 13 July.

Gyagar Nala

By 16 July we were ready to move up the Gyagar nala for our last climbs in the valley. As we entered the valley we were faced with a

3. See *H.J.*, Vol. 40, p. 105, for early history of Shilla.

4. See *H.J.*, Vol. 43, p. 190.

gentle col of scree at 5840 m on the north. We christened this as 'Chaksachan la north' as it appeared to lead down to the foot of Gya. We studied this on the map and later confirmed it by observing it from above. Our excitement to view this peak now mounted. In two days we were at the foot of the very steep névé coming from Runse. Climbing this was tricky, and our porters excelled here. We had to fix ropes and on 18 July we were on the Gyagar ridge at 5970 m. And behold, across the valley in the north stood Gya. It was a majestic rock monolith, rising about 1200 m steeply from the valley bottom. A sharp conical top guarded the view to Tibet. It was awe-inspiring and this view was a fitting finale. It will defy the best of rock climbers and will require immense logistic arrangements to approach it.

The same evening, 18th, we went up 'Runse' (6175 m) in an hour, now easily within our reach. But ahead the ridge dropped to a col and to 'Goor' (c. 6160 m). It was impossible to cross this peak to reach the final slopes of Gyagar (c. 6400 m). So we decided to go west from the camp next day. 'Geling' (6080 m) was a rounded dome while 'Gyadung' (6160 m) was a sharp ridge top. Both were fairly good climbs. Again and again the views from the tops were exciting.

'The cantonment' was humming with activity on 21 July. We had ferried the luggage up and it was time for the final departure from Lingti, now quite familiar to us. We quickly withdrew to Shelatse below Kuli la, each stage being a hard repeat ferry for the luggage. No yaks would come up as Lingti lower down was unfordable in July. We took a different route to return, something that would complete the inquiry into the valley.

We climbed up to Syarma la (5040 m) and down the steep scree slopes to the Syarma nala on 24 July. It was turbulent and the next day in cold cloudy weather Dhiren was almost swept away in the crossing. Wet and shivering we climbed up to Shilla jot (5850 m) to link up with the route of our 1983 trip. It was a long two-day march that led us through to Langja and Kaja—back to chhang, momoes and a rough bus journey to Manali.

For 5 years we had dreams of Lingti and Gya. Now it was fulfilled, substantially if not in a full measure. Working to fulfil a dream is satisfying. And it was important to pursue it: for if Samuel Coleridge's dream was broken, Kubla Khan would have never been written.

21

Unknown Spiti: The Middle Country

1983

MOST OF US have heard of Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter. Their escape and their seven years in Tibet are legend. Like them, M. Paidar and Ludwig Schmaderer had also escaped from the British internment camp during the war. They followed a year after Harrer using much the same route to the frontier and into Tibet. But they returned to Spiti with tragic consequences.

In July 1945 when still wandering aimlessly and not knowing that the war was over, L. Schmaderer was brutally robbed and murdered at or near the little village of Tabo in Spiti. H. Paidar returned to Poo on the Suttlej, and followed the river down to Sarahan where he gave himself up and made a full report to the police. The murderers were arrested.¹ It was the first such crime reported in Spiti for over 40 years.² Perhaps this was for the first time that Spiti was reported in such a bad light.

The earliest travellers here were the famous Gerard brothers. They explored 'Bashair, Spiti and Kanwar' (Kinnaur) in 1817.³ Since then except for a mountaineering party it was cocooned in its own fold.

Spiti which literally means 'middle country' lies between India and Tibet, and across the main chain of the Himalaya. One of the

1. *Abode of Snow*, p. 286.

2. See *H.J.*, Vol. XV, p. 69 for full account by H. Paidar.

3. *Abode of Snow*, p. 86.

routes from Kinnaur allows an easy route into Spiti. It is now motorable and kept open for most of the year. The original 6 week journey on foot has been reduced to 24 hours, but is equally tiring with crowded buses, road-blocks and unmetalled roads. About 10 km ahead of Puh, the Satluj river enters India cutting through the Himalaya near Shipki la. The Spiti river flows into the Satluj after its turbulent journey, at Khab. The road climbs up a series of loops (Kah loops) in 10 km to enter the barren lands of Hangrang valley. About 30 km ahead of Chango one enters Spiti at Sumbo. A road branches east to Kaurik, at the bottom of which the Pare Chu river re-enters India. The Spiti river cuts the valley almost in the centre with side valleys joining it broadly from the east and west.

The Eastern Valleys

The road goes along the Spiti river, the valley floor itself now above 3700 m all along. Valleys open up on the east. The first eastern valley is of Giu nala. This small valley leads to the Lingti valley in the north and also has an exit to Tibet. Ahead at the Lingti village, the river with the same name meets Spiti river. Lingti is one of the largest and the longest valleys of Spiti. It is 60 km long and at its northeastern head, on the Tibetan border stands Gya (6794 m) the highest peak in Spiti.

Further ahead one reaches Kaja (412 km from Shimla) the administrative headquarters of Spiti. It is a small place with a few locals but many government employees. It has electricity supplied through a hydro-electric plant from the Ratang valley. Complete with video-parlour, eating houses and rest house it is a far cry from the earlier days, and other parts of Spiti.

Ahead of Kaja the main road crosses the Spiti river onto its western bank. But to the east are the valleys of Shilla nala (though they do not lead to this legendary peak) and Parilungbi nala. This latter nala leads to the famous Parang la (5578 m) which leads to Chumar in the Rupshu district of Ladakh. Some early crossings of this pass by Europeans have been recorded.⁴ An alternate pass, Takling la (5500 m) is earlier and completes the picture of eastern Spiti.

All these valleys are small in size except the Lingti which goes deep into the mountains taking a northwesterly turn at its junction

4. See *H.J.*, Vol. I, p. 79, Vol. VIII, p. 1181.

with the Chaksachan Lungpa nala. At its head lies the pass of Yangzi Diven (5800 m) and across lies the peak Parilunohi (6166 m). De-

hours, and trucks, daily for 6 months in the year.

Climbs and Explorations

Mountaineers have visited Spiti sporadically. The first climber in the area was J.O.M. Roberts in 1939. He made the first ascent of Chau

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with the Chaksachan Lungpa nala. At its head lies the pass of Yangzi Diwan (5890 m) and across lies the peak, Parilungbi (6166 m). Descending from the pass on the other side one joins the Parang la route, the relay completing the circle. At the head of Chaksachan Lungpa valley stands the majestic Gya. It is a stupendous rock monolith and offers one of the finest challenges. This peak is circumvented by Pare Chu river. Pare Chu starts at the foot of Parang la and flows to the northeast. After about 30 km it takes a huge turn to the south to enter Tibet for an 85 km journey. It again takes a sharp westerly turn to re-enter India at Kaurik and meets Spiti river at Sumdo. This peculiar course at a very high elevation with such fast flowing water is unique.

The Western Valleys

The eastern valleys had relations with Ladakh and Tibet, the western valleys are joined to Kinnaur and Kulu. After entering Spiti from Sumdo, the large Pin river flows from the southwest exactly opposite the Lingti river. This long valley gives major accesses to Spiti. Tari Khango (4865 m) leads to Pin valley from the Bhabha valley of Kinnaur. The Manirang la (5520 m) allows access from the Ropa valley of Kinnaur to Pin. Little further to the west, the Pin-Parvati pass (5319 m) leads to the Parvati valley and Kulu.

North of the Pin valley lie three still relatively unknown valleys: Parahio, Ratang and Gyundi. Each is a narrow gorge, difficult of approach. Each has a host of peaks, side valleys and no easy passes on the Kulu side. Parahio bifurcates from the Pin valley. Gyundi has three major branches, each a valley by itself. It is proposed to declare the Parahio valley a National Park. This will forbid all entry into the valley by locals, in order to preserve the flora and fauna. The difficult Ratang gorge now boasts of a hydroelectric station right near the glacier. A 10 km road has been blasted out in this gorge. Finally, at the northern end the road climbs up to Kunzum la (4550 m) the traditional western exit into Lahul (and Kulu over the Rohthang pass). This road leads to Manali (201 km from Kaja) and is covered by buses (in 10 hours) and trucks, daily for 6 months in the year.

Climbs and Explorations

Mountaineers have visited Spiti sporadically. The first climber in the area was J.O.M. Roberts in 1939. He made the first ascent of Chau

Chau Kang Nilda (CCKN) (6303 m) (then known as Guan Nelda).⁵ J. de V. Graaff and K. Snelson reccecd the area in 1952. But some of the most admirable exploration was done by P.F. Holmes in 1955 and 1956. In the first trip, with T.H. Braham he entered the Ratang valley and made fine ascents. They briefly entered Gyundi valley and made some detailed observations. CCKN was also climbed and the mystery about the height of Shilla clearly established.⁶ On his return visit in 1956, Holmes was most energetic in climbing and exploring the Ratang and Parahio systems. He ultimately crossed two interesting passes, first from Ratang to Parahio and then into the Dibibokri nala to Kulu. It is to his credit that such a difficult and unknown area was well recorded. To date, no other party has ventured into these gorges, which remain a most inviting area.

Similarly the Lingti valley had no visitors till 1983. An Indian team led by me entered the valley till the Tangmor gorge stopped the party. We returned to Kaja and explored the approaches from Shilla jot, further to the north. In the bargain, 5 peaks were climbed, but the full exploration of upper Lingti cluded us.⁷ We returned in 1987 fortified by the earlier experience. Lingti valley was penetrated to its head, the problem of locating Gya was solved and the peak photographed. Crossing over Yangzi Diwan pass (5890 m) we crossed the watershed to Ladakh and climbed Parilungbi (6166 m). Shilla for the first time was attempted from the north and also from its eastern col. We returned via Shilla jot completing the full exploration and climbing various other peaks in the different side valleys.

Other climbers to Spiti have mostly repeated the ascents of CCKN, Shilla and Kanamo, all near the Langja village. Their activities are tabulated with references, at the end of the article.

No account about Spiti would be complete without the mention of its many other facets. It has a unique store-house of shales and a unique geological collection. Its Gompas (monasteries) are sights to behold by virtue of their positions, and here religion is a real guiding force. In the last few years it has witnessed much better administration, progress by way of road-building, bus services and canals. The average Spitian is better off even in the worst of winters. Of course some loss in cultural values is evident, but then, progress has its price.

5. See *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 129.

6. See *Mountain and A Monastery* by P.F. Holmes. Also *H.J.*, Vol. XX, p. 185.

7. See *H.J.*, Vol. 40, p. 96 for details about Shilla.

In spite of the greater access and communication, luckily for mountaineers there has not been an excess of climbing activity. To a mountain lover it is still an unknown and inviting proposition with several trekking routes and hundreds of unclimbed peaks. To an outsider, let alone the mountains, even the area and name Spiti inspires awe. It is as forbidden as ever. After Schmaderer's murder, Paidar had gone back to the internment camp. Thank God he did not stay seven years and write about it!

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5. *Men and Mules on Mission of Democracy* by P. Sharma. (Describes work of an election party to Spiti).
6. *District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti*. Government of Himachal Pradesh. (Covers mostly administrative details).
7. *Temples and Legends of Himachal Pradesh* by P.C. Roy Chaudhury (see chapter on Spiti).
8. *Indo-Tibet Border Police Bulletin*, October-December 1975 (see article by K.C. Mehra, a most exhaustive work on Spiti).
9. *Lahaul-Spiti: A Forbidden Land in the Himalayas* by S.C. Bajpai.

Zanskar-Ladakh

Until one is committed there is hesitance, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of adventure, initiative and creation there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never have otherwise occurred. A whole chain of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.

*Whatever you can do or dream you can,
begin it.*

*Boldness has genius, power and magic
in it.*

—Goethe

Ladakh for the tourists and Ladakh for the real trekkers and climbers are two different worlds. Many stay at Leh, visit gompas and enjoy the barrenness. But if you can manage the permits, there is nothing in this world like Pangong lake. It changes colour every hour with the sun and the brown hills behind make it appear as if from a Tolkein story world.

Bhupesh and myself covered the area vigorously. 'A pass a day keeps the trekkers happy' was our motto. The rare monastery of Zumkal taught us a thing or two. The head lama could knock us out with a sip of ancient rakshi which he offered. The experience of the walk across Zanskar and Kishtwar over high mountain country passes is quite near to nirvana.

Muslim, after his marriage, decided to introduce Sabina to the 'pleasures of trekking' in Zanskar. But the beauty of the barrenness does not attract everyone. With Geeta and Sabina it was a very different Zanskar this time, now after a decade. Luckily Muslim still continues climbing.



22

The Enjoyable Difference

A Trek to Zaskar

1990

‘YOU WILL BE standing in a queue to cross Shingo la.’ Mahavir Thakur at Manali mountaineering institute was advising us. ‘There are so many foreigners trekking to Zaskar that camp sites are crowded.’

‘But surely the monasteries are beautiful,’ quipped Muslim.

‘Oh, on some days there are more tourists than lamas at some monasteries.’

Sabina, on her first trek to the Himalaya was kicking Muslim under the table.

‘We will surely meet many interesting people on the way.’ I tried to salvage the situation.

‘Those large parties hardly mingle with anyone and they don’t speak our language. You see they are mostly French and Germans.’

Our exasperation was complete. We had selected the popular trek to Zaskar as someone called it ‘the best trek around’ and now at Manali at the start of the trek, the situation looked different. We were used to climbing and trekking in the unknown valleys, beyond the Inner Line, where we never saw another human for weeks. Now we were threatened with an explosion of trekkers, so to speak. Moreover we generally went in all male teams moving fast and harmoniously. Now we were three couples, Muslim Contractor, Arun Samant and I with our spouses. ‘How lucky’ someone said. It was fun but in some ways it hindered our plans too. After many permutations and combinations finally we were to trek an easy route together and via Shingo la, though to go in from Phirtse la is far better. And unfortunately beforehand we had planned for a long hard trek. So we had extra porters

and mules. I will always remember mules half loaded, porters drinking *chang* and playing cards and me doling out payments to them.

'Don't worry, you will meet lamas on the pass chanting *Om Mani Padme Hum*.' I tried to encourage the ladies.

'And Zaskari landscape will surely be striking.'

Muslim, after a puff on his pipe gave the final edict. 'Let's say simply, it's going to be different.'

20 July 1990 saw us camped at Darcha. We had come here by bus from Manali-Keylong. We were camping with about a dozen other people. That evening Lesenfants Main from Switzerland introduced himself to us. 'My name means *chilling wind* and I am a lama'. His knowledge of the monasteries was very educative and he was on his fourth visit to Zaskar. He educated us on the intricacies of Buddhism and talked about its spread in Europe. Two tough-looking physical training instructors joined us. And so it was going to be all along the trek. We left for Shingo la on the 21st. The track followed the valley to Jankar-Sumdo in short stages. first along Jankar nala and then along Sumdo nala. We had to cross Jankar nala in a pulley. In Manali a trekker had given us a photo of the pulleywala to be handed over to him. As we waved out the picture he came across promptly and posed for another photo with us. Almost all Zaskaris have their pictures sent in from Europe.

All along the track till Shingo la we saw excellent peaks on both sides of the valley. With only 2-3 days of approach on a mule track these peaks offer excellent climbing around 6000 m. (1) Peak 6248 m (above Ranjak in SE in Sumdo valley), (2) Peak 5915 m (towards the west on the climb to Shingo la), and (3) the dome-shaped peak of 5973 m (rising above Shingo la in the east) were attractive. But the pick of the lot is a sharp square peak 6318 m to the south of Shingo la and above Ranjak in the west. From Jankar-Sumdo camp the valley to NW along Jankar nala would lead to upper Miyar nala at Khanjar via Tarasalmu pass (5358 m) and to many other peaks. There are numerous possibilities of peaks, passes (and glaciers!) around here with easy accessibility.

The ladies were finding the going tough. Lack of acclimatization and physical strain was slowing them down. The fit French parties crossing us with their *Saluts* did not help matters. The climb to Shingo la (5090 m) was strenuous for them. As we waited at the pass for the ladies, I heard the lama chant from far away. 'Om Mani, Om Mani: terrible. . . terrible. . . !' It was Sabina who reached the pass utterly

exhausted.

'Where are your lamas,' was the only thing she could ask.

'Look at the better side, at least there is no queue at the pass.'

'There they are,' my wife Geeta finished the subject, pointing to the south.

Sure enough a party of very fit Austrians arrived in a jiffy at the pass. A quick look all around, drank some water and they were on the way down giving us a 'what's wrong with you?' look, along with an encouraging *Berg Frei* (happy climbing).

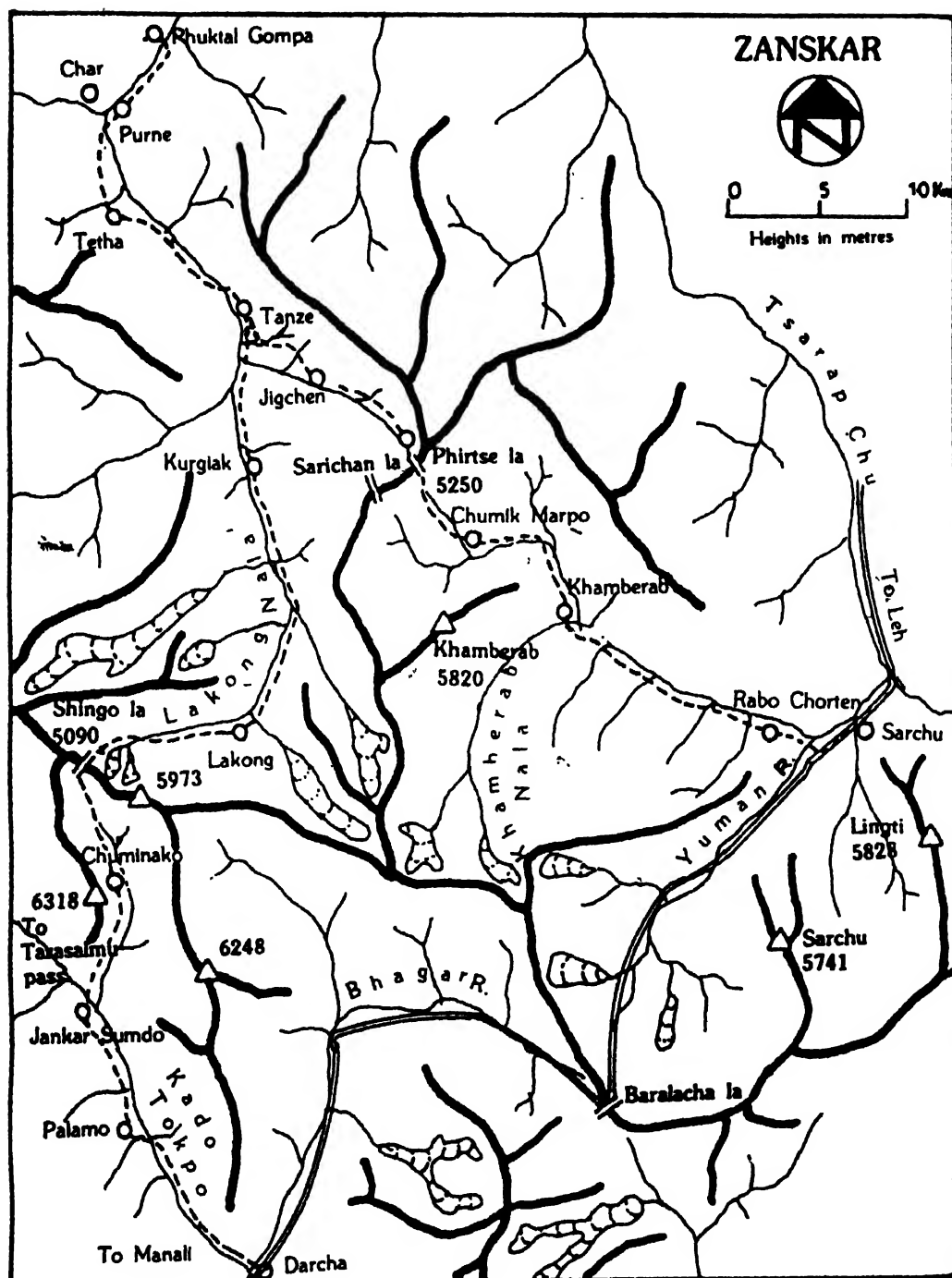
We started on the way down to Zanskar and it was quite late and cold. Following behind us was a lone lovely German girl in shorts and sweat-shirt. Suddenly she walked a step backwards and collapsed. Muslim rushed to her and with gestures she conveyed that she was feeling extremely cold. Our good Samaritan offered her a thick pull-over which was Sabina's! He never heard the end of it till the end of the trek.

This trek to Zanskar and the route over Shingo la was made so popular by publication of the book, *Zanskar The Hidden Kingdom* by Michel Peissel who also made a TV film on Zanskar. This has, in particular, attracted many French trekkers, in what Bill Aitken calls 'Peissel's cultural colonisation of Zanskar' in his article, (see *H.J.*, Vol. 45, p. 103). The book by Peissel abounds in distortions and was severely criticised in India. 'Thus, we are told that the Shingo la leads to India. Where pray, does Peissel believe Zanskar is? In Tibet? or outer Mongolia? . . . One hopes that the next time he sets out to "discover" a hidden valley, he starts from his backyard where, perhaps, he could do some genuine soul searching,' so wrote Sudhir Sahi while reviewing the book (see *H.J.*, Vol. 37, p. 221).

Many of the trekkers we met had heard about or read the book but were not bothered about its contents.

Our first camp in Zanskar at Lakong (4420 m) on the 26th was great. Steep brown rock walls contrasting against green camping site and of course a 'queue' of tents. That evening it was Catherine Maout and Laurence Yvinec, two school teachers from France who continued talking with gestures and sign language. One thing you had to admire. Without knowing the language, with very limited resources or without adequate information these trekkers were enjoying themselves. We were getting into the act too.

Next three days along the Kurgiak nala were gentle walking. A track went east from Kurgiak village over Sarichen la to the Lingti



Southeastern Zaskar.

plains.¹ Lovely villages and green fields continued. Village children came out in numbers asking for chocolates. You cannot blame them, anyone would love Swiss chocolate. The Zanskari life-style has not been completely devastated by the foreigner's influx. No doubt they are more commercial, charge for camping, more heavily for food and facilities. Many have travelled all over India, some lamas have been abroad too, but surprisingly most have come back to face the Zanskari winter.

There are many other aspects of change too. Food depots, schools, medical facilities and planned cultivation of trees. But progress comes slowly to these areas, perhaps mercifully so.

At Purne we had to turn east along Tsarap Lingti river for Phuktal gumpa. This river, originating near Pangpo la (Rupshu) zigzags here. Ahead it meets the Zaskar river at Padum, goes north to meet the Indus at Nimo in Ladakh, travels west and south to the Arabian Sea near Karachi. What a journey for the water rushing at Purne.

As we were about to leave Purne, a three-member Japanese T.V. crew rushed in, looking very fit and urbane. With them was Yoshio Ogata, the famous Japanese mountaineer. We immediately spread mats under the poplar trees and talked endlessly about his climbs (Everest, Kangchenjunga, Rimo) and future plans. Suddenly Karakoram, Tibet, Arunachal, Nepal and many other areas came alive at Purne in the disarming smile of Ogata. Meeting even one such personality in the mountains makes the trip worthwhile. Purne must have seen umpteen meetings like this.

After an hour's walk we crossed a bridge. The track climbed a little. Geeta who was ahead of me suddenly stopped, pointing to a giant cave about 100 m above the riverbed. We both stood motionless. The Phuktal gumpa was inside and around this cave. What a sight! Of all the gumpas I have seen, this one was the most spectacular.

It is truly like the imagined Shangri la, clinging to the cliff like a cluster of swallows' nests. The name Phuktal or Phugtāl as it is sometimes spelt, comes from the Zanskari word 'Phug', meaning cave, and gumpa is built into a massive cave in the cliff face, spilling out in a cascade of whitewashed cells and buildings.²

1. See *H.J.*, Vol. 45, p. 100 for Bill Aitken's trek here.

2. Mike Harding in *Footloose in the Himalaya*, p. 59.

The entire mountainside was lined up with houses, colourful gumpa on the top and Tsarap Lingti river flowing at the bottom. As the legend goes the gumpa was built here due to a forest on the slopes above it. On the barren slope, a lone tree now stands out. It is supposed to house the spirit of the first guru—Rimpoche.

Three Indian sages had discovered the cave and settled in it when along came the saintly Lama, Chamsen Cherap Zampo who, on meeting the three holy men, suggested that a great monastery be built here. The three men answered that the cave was too small, so the Lama, performing a miracle, made it grow to its present gigantic size. According to this account the monastery was originally of the Sakyapa (Red Hat) sect. But contradicting this account is the statement that Rinchen Zangpo founded Phugtal.³

Staying in the gumpa on the upper floors is a pleasure you won't forget for a long time. The view down to Tsarap Lingti river, lama chants and walk in the cave along the houses medieval in character is an experience. We saw the memorial stone of Alexander Csoma de Koros, the Hungarian scholar who stayed here from August 1825 to November 1826. While we were there a variety of trekkers visited the gumpa. Young lone Swiss trekker, French Everest climber, rich Countess, European lamas and of course Muslim's pullover lady. Some stayed the night. The talks revolved around their travel, life and climbs. It was an international *mela*. The ladies were refreshed with the rest and joined in the fun with the foreigners. Sabina excelled at stories of 'great river crossings', and 'climbing high peaks' that thrilled the audience. The exclamation sounds in many languages *Oui*, *Wow*, *Ach* and *Vah* mixed well. But it was time to go back and the 'terrible terrible' chant returned as we climbed towards Phirtse la.

The trek bifurcates from Tanze, till where we had to retrace our route. As we climbed up slowly out came a small boy followed by his mother, both obviously French. Little behind was Mircille et Michel Daon, his father, with a typical flowing French beard. He was a wood sculptor and a famous one at that. Out came the stove and over tea and pancakes we learnt about the art scene in France. He had visited Zanskar many times before and trekked without porters and any other paraphernalia.

3. *Zanskar The Hidden Kingdom* by Michel Peissel, p. 175.



Phuktal gumpa

On the other side of Phirtse la (5230 m) the terrain opened up. The flat long Lingti plains stretched in front.

Lingti plains—lie above Lingti, and though presenting a fine level expanse of grass, with abundance of fuel, (*dema* or Tibetan furze) have no surface water, and cannot be irrigated, so that in this dry climate cultivation would be impossible.

—*Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, p. 569

We walked on the plains for the next two days, crossing Khamberab nala on the way. Our final camp was at the end of the Lingti plains. This was a great site and I will always regret not having begun our trek from here. The Yunan river came in from the SW, Sarchu river from the SE, the Lingti river from the west and all merged with the Tsarap river coming from the east and continued to Zaskar. Above the scenery rose peak Lingti, 5828 m in the east, Khamberab, 5820 m in the west and peak Sarchu, 5741 m in the SE, three of the earliest triangulated points on the map. We exchanged a final *Gruss Gott* (greetings to God) and our Indian *Ram Ram* with the German trekkers and left for civilization.

At the edge of the plains was the border of Lahul and Ladakh marked by a square stone called 'Phalang Danda.'

Phalang Danda or Lingti boundary mark on the borders of Lahoul and Ladakh: situated north-east of the Bara Lacha pass and just above Lingti (for Sarchu) camp. It is called Lingti by the Lahoulis, and is a high, square, insulated rock rising out of the Lingti plain.

—*Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, p. 663

Now a metalled road (Manali-Leh highway) passes next to this stone. About 200 vehicles pass every day (particularly after the closure of the Srinagar-Leh road). This spectacular road, passing through great mountain country, has become popular to 'jeep-safari' travellers. To mountaineers it opens up scores of peaks: on Lingti plains, around Baralacha pass, above Darcha and Patseo—to name a few areas. You can shift base camps by truck and climb a dozen peaks in a fortnight or so.

We climbed on to a truck for Manali. A long line of trucks and jeeps were held up at Darcha due to the overflowing of the river on

the road. A hapless international crowd stranded here was impressed to hear Sabina:

'This is nothing, we crossed many rivers like this in Zanskar'.

Our driver heard that too and the truck rolled ahead in grand style. A slightly scary affair though. We were at Manali past midnight in about 14 hours from Phalang Danda.

'How was it,' Mahavir asked us at Manali.

'Well we heard the lama chants on the pass, met people and crossed rivers.' Geeta and Sabina were now in form. 'It was fun, making so many new friends: flowers, Zanskari landscape, gom-pas. . . . ' It went on and on.

But again the final word came from Muslim:

'It was different. But the difference was enjoyable.'

For our return we decided to take a ride on the Kangra Valley Railway, which runs from Joginder Nagar to Pathankot. This narrow gauge railway passes through the spectacular countryside of Dhaula Dhar.⁴ It was in pouring rain that we started the journey in a leaky bogie to reach the military camp at Yol. 'You are lucky that the train is running today at all' was the comment of the Station Master at Palampur. We were going to Yol to stay with our friend Col Prem Chand and to visit Dharamsala.

Italian prisoners transported from Europe were interned at this military camp during the Second World War. During the day they were taken out in the surrounding hills. In the evening a whistle announced: 'To *Your Own Locations*', as a signal to return to the camp. Italians, not knowing English well shortened it to 'YOL' giving this camp a new name. Now the village, area and the camp is known by this name as if it was always there. After two enjoyable days the Colonel shouted, 'To YOL' and we were on our way to Bombay.

The Route

Manali-Keylong-Darcha (bus).

Trek

Darcha (3303 m) to Palamo (3600 m)	8	km
To Jankar-Sumdo (3910 m)	6	km
To Chuminako (4660 m)	5	km
To Shingo la (5090 m)	5	km
To Lakong (4420 m) in Zanskar	5	km

4. See next page for details.

To Kurgiak (4025 m)	14	km
To Tetha (3960 m)	16	km
To Phuktal gumpa (3870 m)(via Purne)	8	km

Return

Phuktal to Tanze (3810 m) (via Tetha)	12	km
To Jingchen (4480 m)	6	km
To foot of Phirtse la (4790 m)	8	km
To Phirtse la (5250 m)	3	km
To Chumik Marpho (c. 4880 m) in Ladakh (junction of Phirtse la and Sarichen la routes)	7	km
To Khamberab (4420 m)	12	km
To Rabo Chorten (4360 m)	16	km
To Sarchu (4240 m)	4	km

(We took 8 days each way but some do it in even half that time on this popular trek).

Period

14 July to 14 August 1990.

Kangra Valley Railway

The Kangra Valley Railway (KVR) was begun in 1926 and completed in 1929 and cost Rs. 296 lakhs, overshooting the estimate by a mere Rs. 162 lakhs! It is 164 km long and the highest point is 1210 m at Ahju. The start at Pathankot is 333 m and Jogindernagar 1139 m with 30 stations on the way. It has only 2 tunnels, unlike the Shimla line which has 103. The line is remarkable for its scenic beauty and environmental wisdom in following natural contours. It has 971 bridges, some of unique design. In 1973 the Pong Hydro Scheme demanded re-alignment of 27 km of track (Jawanwala Shahr to Guler) and this was reported in 1976. The KVR has the nearest approach to the snows than any railway line in India, it's the 2' 6" narrow gauge running parallel to the Dhaula Dhar range only 16 km away. Its severest gradient (beyond Baijnath Paprola) is 1 in 19. This is the steepest gradient for any *Adhesion* line of Indian Railways (Ooty—1 in 12, uses *Rack*). The KVR has 20 crossing stations and 11 slip sidings in case of backsliding runways. The blue livery of the rolling stock add to the appeal of this unobstructive railway.

Above Jogindernagar is Shanan Power House where the narrow

gauge ends. A metre gauge 'trolley' goes up the mountainside to the reservoir. The KVR locos were the steam *ZE* and class *ZF*, now diesel *ZDM3*. The Nagrota-Jogindernagar section (55 km) was closed in 1942 and the line uprooted and sent abroad for the war effort. It was relaid and reopened in 1954. The famous steel-arch bridge across Reond nala, opposite Kangra, 60 m above the river bed was erected in 1927. Banganga bridge between Guler and Jawalamukhi was twice swept away in pre-monsoon storms during erection. Both bridges are epics in Indian Railway engineering history.

KVR is probably one of the most scenic light railways in the world, its success being to blend successfully the engineering works with the aesthetics of the Kangra valley. As an unremunerative line it can be closed any time and those who value gentle modes of Himalayan transport should set aside a day to jump aboard soon.

—Bill Aitken

23

A Trek in Ladakh and Zaskar

1980

FOR THE last two days we had been confined to our seats in the bus. We were comfortable, enjoying the scenery which was totally different from anything we had seen before. The end of the road was Leh. Travellers had once to face a month-long journey, but we now did it in just two days; and there are many who, of course, today prefer to fly.

Leh itself bears the signs of the past and the scars of the present. One is struck by the barrenness, brown but colourful. The moonlight is reflected on the barren slopes, which makes it an unforgettable sight. The cool air is arid and lacks oxygen. You can see the mixture of cultures, Buddhist and Muslim. The features of the people vary from Mongolian to Aryan. We feel we are in the Trans-Himalaya. We visit the Moravian Christian Mission Church (1885), now barely furnished. There is a graveyard of travellers who came across from the north and south. One particular monument is for Dr. Ferdinand Stoliczka.¹ He was a naturalist and geologist attached to the Central Asia Mission of Sir Thomas Douglas Forsyth and died at 'Malgo' (Murgo) on 19 July 1874. The marble tower on the outskirts of Leh is erected in his memory. When we visited it, a few Indian Army personnel were surrounding it, engaged in some kind of an exercise. This is the second fact that one notices. Since the 1962 war with the Chinese, the Indian Army in this region has been reinforced heavily and one finds army personnel everywhere. Their needs, quite understandably, have first priority and everything else is secondary. This reality, however inevitable it may seem, has taken its own toll. What was started for

¹ A bird is named after him, 'Stoliczka's Bush Chat'.

defence, has been further consolidated by tourism. In the streets of Leh, you will find tourists everywhere. At small Tibetan restaurants, expensive hotels, or buying recently manufactured 'antiques' in the streets at exorbitant prices. All the monasteries charge their visitors entrance fees for 'maintenance'. I used to think that charging an entrance fee for a visit to the house of the Divine Presence was against the tenets of Buddhism. But that is no longer the case and all these realities are here to stay. Some of the popular monasteries are anything but a pleasure to visit. This is irrespective of their cultural heritage, which is certainly unique. But then Leh has for ages been a meeting place of the caravans from Yarkand, Tibet, Kashmir and Kulu. Perhaps, in the modern context, the phenomenon has been extended to a meeting of cultures from the West and the East. It remains to be seen how the Ladakhis absorb this recent exposure. Only time can tell.

The word that greets you at Leh is *Jule*. An expression of hello, thank you, *namaste* and goodbye combined. As we became acquainted with the local people we were to hear it again and again. We were told that now Ladakh has 'increased' rainfall, from about 4 inches in the past to 5 inches now! Ladakhis declare that the Nubra valley is the most beautiful in the area with thick 'forests'. We looked for these forests till someone pointed out a growth of shrubs about a foot high, about quarter of a mile away! One can see a group of poplar trees miles away and they fence these shrubs and tend them like children. At Leh we could not find any porters who would carry loads, which is unlike what one meets with in the other parts of the Himalaya. This was confirmed all along the trek, particularly as this is a period of the warmest weather and the scarce human population was busy harvesting and preparing for the long and severe winter. And what a winter it must be with temperatures falling to -40°C and all the lakes and rivers frozen, including the mighty Indus. Everything, rain, water, vegetation, food, humans is scarce here. A traveller looks with admiration at the people who have lived for centuries in such a terrain. The geography and climate of an area constitutes the permanent basis for its history and culture. 'The land is so barren and the passes so high that only the best friends or fiercest enemies would want to visit us', says a Ladakhi proverb. Ladakh has had its share of the latter and now it is flooded with the former.

Bhupesh and I reached Leh on 21 July 1980. Having spent a week-end climbing at Gulnarg for acclimatization, we were put to

minimal discomfort. But all along, right till here, we were firmly denied the permits which one must possess to go north of Leh. The sympathetic approach of the officials here made it possible for us to obtain these. I would say we were just lucky.

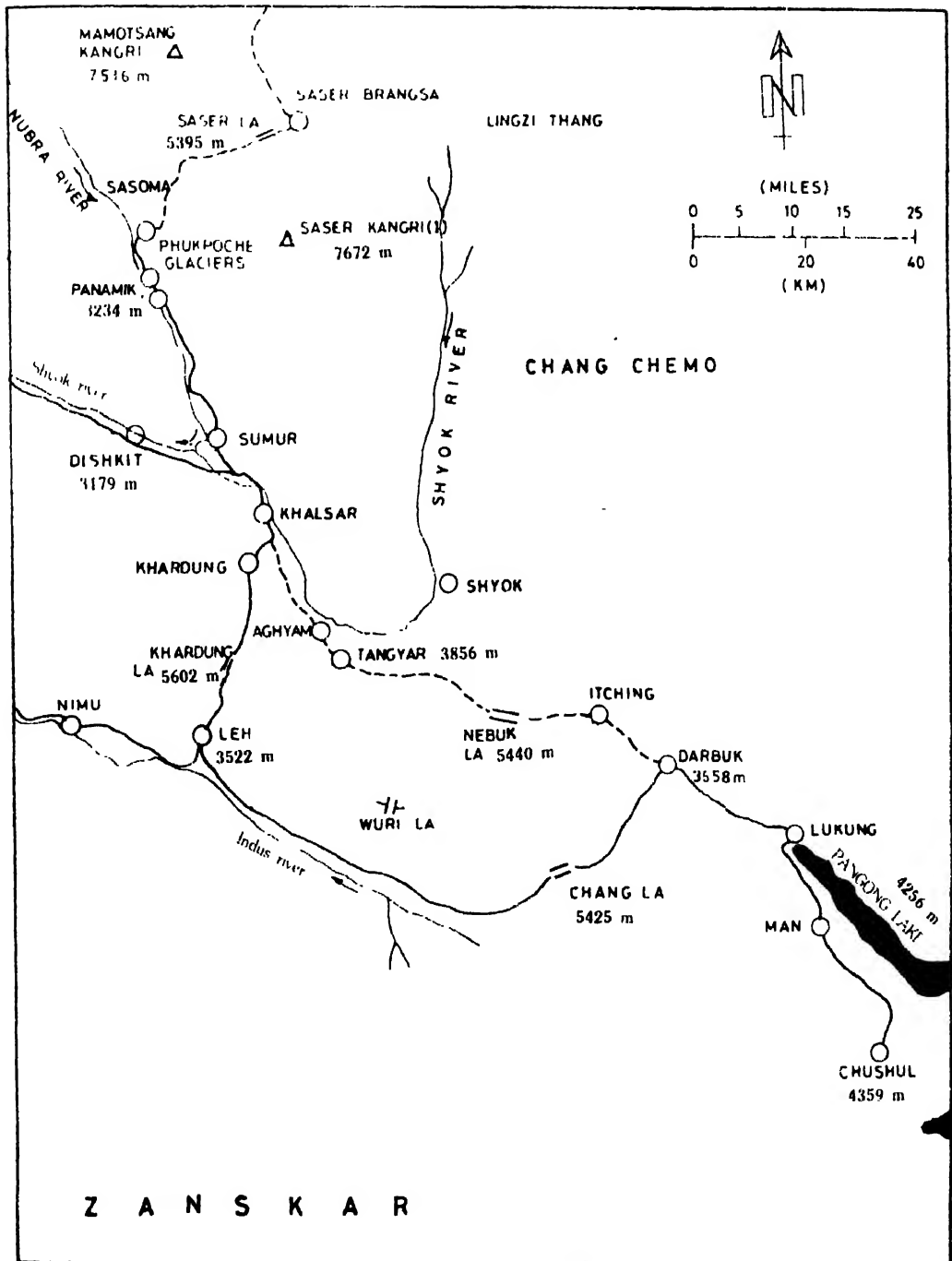
After five days we were on a truck on the road to the Nubra valley. We left at 0400 a.m. and had the pleasure of waking up the sentry at South Polu to check our permits. I am not sure whether he was too sleepy or could not read English but we were through without any excitement or delay.

It was the most bumpy ride ever. Particularly after crossing Khardung la (5602 m), we had a terrible time. Our driver celebrated this crossing of one of the highest motorable roads in the world by opening a bottle of rum. He had cause to celebrate! The northern side was covered with ice and at one point the road cut through a hanging glacier. We had all to get down and push the loaded truck to help it pass. All along this eventful journey, the truck climbed 2140 m and then descended 2440 m in ten hours.

The *piece de resistance* of the journey was a rich Ladakhi lady who sat next to Bhupesh. She was wearing a giant hat, *p̄rak*, with those big ear flaps and turquoises which one sees on the postcards. 'A lady wearing a helicopter on the head!' (courtesy the Indian Army). But fortunately you cannot smell them on a postcard. Unwashed for a life-time, and oiled with yak butter, it was a test of endurance to sit through by her side. We met the Shyok river at Khalsar and ahead crossed the suspension bridge to land up at Sumur, at the entrance of the Nubra valley. Our battered hips and backs were most grateful when this journey ended.

Along the Nubra

We spent the next four days walking around the Nubra valley, mostly on road. Sumur to Panamik (18 km) and Sasoma (15 km) was a pleasurable trek in the mornings and an oven in the afternoons. Gompas at Sumur and opposite Panamik were worth a visit. We camped near the only house at Sasoma. The owner regaled us with many tales from the past. He had visited Yarkand and Khotan several times: perhaps one of the last few of that generation. The stories of those caravans and hardships of the route were amazing. 'Nothing is known of the men who, centuries ago, first ventured across this monstrous wilderness, in search of trade or conquest. It is easier to imagine the toil, hardship and frustration, they must have endured than to



Zanskar and Ladakh.

understand what inspired them, the courage and tenacity to discover a way.² From Sasoma to the north lay the Siachen glacier drained by the Nubra river. To the east wound up that famous Central Asia Trade Route or the 'Skeleton Trail' to Saser la and Karakoram Pass. The spirit was willing but alas those 'permits' put a full-stop here. Anyway, though it closed the door, it certainly left a large window open.

We returned to Phukpoche. With a porter we left for a seven-day outing to the western base of Saser Kangri (7672 m), a route followed by the earlier expeditions. The snout of the South and North Phukpoche glaciers was two days away. But the route passed over a deep and narrow gorge. The famous Rishi gorge would appear a walk-over compared to certain sections here. Overhanging rocks, or loose scree with the Phukpoche nala always rushing underneath, was not exactly an enjoyable route. We camped on a little green patch.

On the first day we climbed a higher point of a ridge to get a panoramic view of both the glaciers. In the northwest, the Saltoro range dominated by Saltoro Kangri (7742 m) was visible. Lashi (6264 m) was to our north. Saser Kangri remained hidden by a nearby peak.

On 5 August we proceeded along the left lateral moraine of the South Phukpoche glacier for about 4 km and till 5640 m. From here one could get a complete panoramic view of Saser Kangri I (7672 m), II (7513 m), and IV ('Cloud Peak'). It was a most imposing sight and the drop from the summits to the glacier was sheer and with many overhanging blocks. This was the best and highest panorama in the Indian part of the Karakoram.

Within a day we were washing ourselves in the hot springs at Panamik. An army truck dropped us at Dishkit beyond the confluence of the Nubra and Shyok. The monastery here is particularly noteworthy and luckily unspoiled. We could see a few of those famous double-humped camels of Central Asia. The poor creatures are now carrying stones for the local builders.

Along the Shyok

At Khalsar we failed to get any porters or mule for the next part of our trek. So the evening of 10 August saw the two of us marching along the Shyok, eastwards, with heavy packs. Plain after plain of stony waste and, hopping over boulders, we trekked for two days to

2. *That Untravelled World* by Eric Shipton, p. 144

Aghyam (3200 m). From here we turned south along the Lazum Lungpa. Offers of even exorbitant rates to carry out luggage were rejected by the villagers who favoured looking after their harvest. Evidently one cannot eat paper or coins through a six-month winter! Luckily that night at Tangyar, Dorjee and his female donkey were ready to accompany us. Breathing a sigh of relief, we marched off to Nebuk la (5440 m). It was a long but easy ascent which afforded a far distant view of Chogolisa (7654 m) and Masherbrum (7821 m). On the other side we dropped to Itching. The next morning we had to defend the honour of our donkey from the local population which was considerably happy at the sight of female company. We were forced to be chivalrous for if left alone, our carrier would have thrown off the luggage to defend herself with her hind-legs. Reaching Darbuk and Tangtse was great fun, to say the least.

Along the Pangong

We enjoyed two days of 'fauji company'. A truck took us to Lukung on the shores of the Pangong lake. I have never seen a better sight. The crystal clear saltish water shone in many shades of blue depending upon its depth. It literally changed shades with the sunlight. With the backdrop of mountains of various hues and colours, it was a sight for the gods. At about 4300 m, the air was cool even in this, the warmest month of Ladakh. 'The lake is about 4 km wide on the average and at least 136 km long. The extent of the known portion is, therefore, upwards of 250 square miles (400 sq km), or about the same size as the holy lake of Mansarovar.'¹

Only about a fourth is in India—till it takes an easterly turn and disappears into Chinese territory. Towards the east, it is supposed to have sweet water. With its rare black-necked cranes and other birds, it is a sight beyond one's wildest imagination. But alas it is also 'sensitive', some of the opposite bank being controlled by the Chinese. We trekked along the bank but, even with so much water around, there was still no drinking water available for long distances. The villages of Man and Merak with the backdrop of the snowy peaks of the Pangong range offered a grand view. Sipping chhang, we met a party of traders from Lahul. For generations they have been visiting this region loaded with goods which are locally required. In return they

3. *Ladakh* by Alexander Cunningham, p. 137.



Shingo la, Zanskar.

carry back gems, stones, hides and wool, a kind of barter or exchange. Even where modern transport is available, they continue the trade on mules, exactly like their forefathers. Perhaps, one of last examples of caravaning!

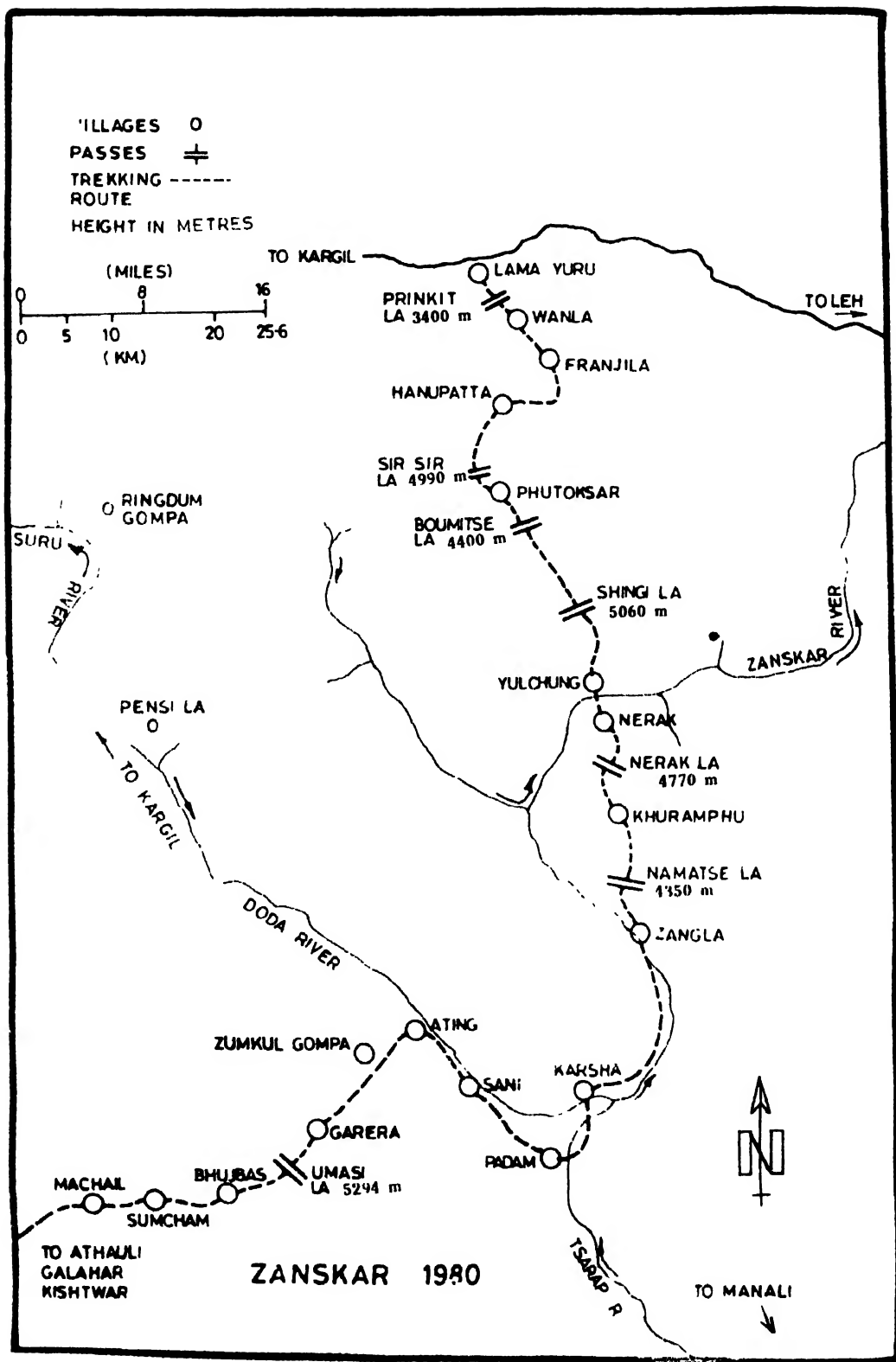
Towards the southern end lay Chushul. It is a historic site, both in the ancient and modern context. Being on the Tibetan trade route from Rudok in Tibet, it played a prominent part in Zorawarsingh's Tibetan campaigns in the 1840s. And, in 1962, during the Chinese-Indian war it witnessed plenty of action. With its height of 4360 m, it also boasts of having the 'highest post office' in the world. After a sojourn there we returned to Tangtse. A visit to Sachukul gampa from here was rewarding. The lama, who at the start willingly opened the lower sanctum, inquired whether we had received fresh supplies in the canteen. When he learned to his horror that we were not big 'bosses' from the army, he emphatically declared that the keys of the other sections were lost! On 19 August we left by truck for Leh across Chang la (5425 m). On the way at the Shey monastery we saw a group of thoroughly bored tourists witnessing the lama dance. Even with my scanty knowledge I could see that it was anything but graceful or genuine. But, strictly speaking, dollars are dollars! And who cares? We were back at Leh.

To Padam

We spent two days of rest and completed the formalities. For the last long trek across Zaskar we reached Lamayuru monastery, half way on the road to Kargil. The route we were to follow was a popular one. This time we had two Nepali porters with us. The first week of trekking was to lead us to Padam, the heart of Zaskar.

But unfortunately 'Jule' here is followed by 'Kharu' (Give me food). From the smallest kid to the richest wedding party we encountered, all had the same question. Foreign chocolates and tins had a special taste, particularly if it is all free! The attitude did not stem from poverty. For staying in any house or food of any kind one has to pay exorbitant sums. The cultural pollution here is at its worst. As for the 'other' kind of pollution, a coloured wrapper or toilet paper shines out in the barren hills.

But all these apart the trek was certainly beautiful and striking. The narrow gorges and rushing torrents made excellent company. From Wanla to Hanupatta we passed through a narrow gorge. Ahead the route goes over Sir Sir la (4990 m) and Shingi la (5060 m) to cross



North Zaskar.

the Zaskar river and enter Zaskar proper. Nerak la (4770 m) and Namatse la (4350 m) offered the most magnificent gorges with towers of scree and balancing stones. Zangla was the first village of importance on the way. We met the Gyalpo (landlord), a kindly elder. On the way to Karsha gumpa we had to cross the river on one of those rope bridges for which Zaskar is famous. It was certainly very scary as the dilapidated bridge swung vigorously, with the cold rushing torrent beneath.

Padam is the administrative headquarters of the valley. It is situated at the southeastern end of a central valley. Many snow peaks surround it. Now it is linked with a 240 km motorable road with Kargil. That brings those challenging peaks within a day's distance from the road-head. In future, this otherwise dull village could afford many climbing opportunities. Zaskar can boast of a significant historical past. It was always frequented by various travellers and climbers. They came over from Shingo la (Himachal Pradesh), Pensi la (Kargil), Umasi la (Kishtwar) or from Ladakh following many routes. The period of the exploration of the Zaskar and Ladakh mountains is certainly over. 'No Pardah in (on) Padam'⁴ ever.

To Kishtwar

On 31 August in a fierce sandstorm we reached Sani gumpa. The last leg of our journey was over Umasi la and out of Ladakh and Zaskar to enter Padar in the south. From Sani we proceeded to Ating, leaving the motorable road at the Tungri bridge. After about 2 km, we turned south to Zumkul gumpa. With one more camp at Garera, we were on the way to Umasi la (5291 m). A long walk on icy slopes and a steep snow climb at the end tired our porters so much that they refused to go ahead. As a result, we were forced to stay 100 m below the pass on 3 September. A cold affair indeed! The southern side was also snowbound and the route rather tricky, circumventing an icefall. A final *Jule* to Ladakh and by evening we were amidst grass, birch trees and flowers. A grand feeling after six weeks in dry Ladakh. It is not surprising that travellers, after months of journeying on the sandy Central Asian plains and Ladakh, on entering Kashmir, declare it to be a heaven on earth. Perhaps it is this contrast that creates the atmosphere of paradise. The next two days (to Machail, Chishot and Athauli

4. See book of the same title by Antonia Deacock, 1952.

in Padar) were sheer delight. A variety of forest, flowers and greenery made up for all those 'dry days'. Gulabgadh, an open fort surrounded by rivers on three sides, was the seat of Gulab Singh, the first Maharaja of Kashmir. In Padar, the fusion of cultures was most striking. Up to Machail the population was Buddhist, under the Zanskari influence. As we went south to meet the Chandrabhaga (Chenab) flowing from Lahul-Pangi, a distinct Hindu population greeted us. Ahead towards Kishtwar, the Muslim and Kashmiri influence took over. Their interaction, always peaceful, was noteworthy.

At long last a bus ride from Galahar to the dak bungalow of Kishtwar. The fame of its khansama whetted our appetites further. A tiring bus journey to Jammu and we were on our way home!

Eastern Karakoram

*Give me these little vigorous mountain hells
than an empty paradise—any day.*

Climbing in the Eastern Karakoram is very different from climbing anywhere else. You are climbing amidst an armed conflict. Saser la or the difficult Siachen glacier are to be crossed even en route to your base camp. Porters are not available and mules are moody, though as sturdy as the terrain. The journey of about 150 km from Leh onwards takes two long days by road in the dilapidated trucks.

My first trip here was to the Terong valley with the British. Even with the hardships and the delays I was hooked onto the Karakoram mountains. We enjoyed ourselves and much exploration was achieved. The moods of Stephen, and the tongue-in-cheek remarks of Victor, added to the Karakoram experience. Arun and Dhiren put in good exploratory climbs as some of us remained busy with the moods of the Terong river and saving our liaison officer from drowning.

Returning after four years, the violent political riots, the mules and rivers combined to defeat us. But we still managed some small victories. Muslim explored the Aq Tash glacier while Monesh climbed three peaks in the last days. I had had a screw fitted in my heel due to a six month old fracture and was in pain. The army jawans always thought that I had a screw loose in my head to come here in this condition.

My best trip to this area was in 1991. We climbed Chong Kumdan and many other peaks. Dave, for whom it was the second trip here, kept the British side going. With the Indian team of good friends a lot was achieved happily.

With so much history around in these ranges, a detailed study of the events and the language revealed some exciting explanations. All these 'heady' things make the heights appear so attractive.

The loose screw in the head still promises to twist.



24

Exploring 'That Valley'—Terong

Climbs in Terong and Rimo Groups

1985

'ON SEPTEMBER 17th Oliver and I started up the (*Siachen*) glacier together, taking thirteen coolies with us. We kept to its (*true*) left side over crumbled moraine with numerous wide crevasses to negotiate. After five hours' rough going we came to a side valley nala at right angles. This was a remarkable sight because it was empty of ice: only a tiny milky stream flowed over a level flood plain at least 300 feet below us as we stood on the main glacier.'¹

This was the discovery of the Terong valley by Dr. Longstaff in 1909. The Eastern Karakoram and the Siachen glacier itself were remote and were explored over a number of years.² This particular side valley between Siachen and Rimo was unheard of and even the locals knew it as Te Rong: plainly 'that valley'.

When in 1929-30 Dutch explorer Dr. Ph.C. Visser and his team embarked on their third journey to the Karakoram, they received a note from Dr. Longstaff: 'When it is desired to survey this unknown corner, will the party please proceed five miles up the Siachen glacier and take the first turning on their right?'³ And following this cryptic advice Vissers discovered and surveyed the Terong valleys.

Since their visit no other explorers or locals had entered this valley. It remained an unknown corner for 55 years. Planning for an expedition to the Eastern Karakoram this was a natural choice, again to quote Longstaff: '. . . valley has been known and pointed out for

1. *This My Voyage* by Dr. Tom Longstaff, p. 189.

2. See article in *H.J.*, 42.

3. *Abode of Snow* by K. Mason, p. 242.

20 years (now 55 years) but the Vissers were first to go there. That work was waiting to be done.⁴ It was still waiting for someone to caress it; to visit all the different valleys and record it. We were the lucky ones.

We were six Indians and five Britishers. The intention was to climb various peaks in the Terong group and Rimo I, an attractive virgin. After the initial correspondence, Steve and Dave arrived in Bombay to start our long journey to Siachen. The entire team gathered on 6 June 1985 at Leh. We were the first civilian team in recent history to be permitted into this politically sensitive area.

Siachen is the scene of recent skirmishes between India and Pakistan. In the past many mountaineering teams were encouraged to come from Rawalpindi into this area over the high Bilafond la. In 1984, a Japanese team was given permission to attempt Rimo I, deep inside the Eastern Karakoram. They were stopped and now the Indian government decided to encourage mountaineers going from Leh. Mountain explorers were always a part of the 'Great Game'. And now they participate in the new adage: 'The proof of possession lies in climbing.'

We waited for the bureaucracy to sort out its papers. We visited gompas, bathed in the Indus, waited for the LO and the Britishers perfected various techniques of eating mangoes and momoes! But above all we came to know each other well enough for Muslim to survive the ghost stories narrated by Jim. It was an enjoyable irritant which ultimately aided our acclimatization in a large measure. We moved on 12 June for a two-day truck ride. The most amazing sight on these soft, rough roads was the improvisation. To replace a punctured tyre instead of jacking up the truck, they would dig out the soft road from underneath!

The road ended at Pra, right near the Siachen snout. We could manage only ten unreliable Ladakhi porters while the army loaned us ten of the troublesome type for a day. All of us helped to ferry the loads with our three permanent porters from Kumaon who excelled throughout the expedition. We climbed up the Siachen moraine and followed it for four hours. There we stood on the eastern edge (true left), looking to the Terong valley, exactly as Visser had done in 1929. He wrote: 'We intended to explore the unknown region, which extends between this glacier (*Siachen*) and the watershed of the head

4. *The Geographic Journal*, Vol. 84/4, October 1934, p. 293, italics mine.

chain of the Karakoram. We expected to find a side valley, filled up by a glacier, and we were quite surprised when, a few miles from the lower end of the glacier, we found a wide trough opening towards the east, into which a part of the Siachen flowed off. This glacier therefore possessed a second, though short snout under which the broad stream of the valley disappeared. It was the entrance to a majestic high mountain region with glaciers of upto nearly 16 miles in length.⁵ Nothing had changed in so many years as we descended to the left bank of Terong Topko and camped after 2 km at 'Gyazgo' (3800 m). We were here in 3 days from Leh while the Vissers had taken 45 days from Srinagar with 445 coolie loads.

The route ahead in the valley, we crossed the Terong Topko to its right bank and proceeded without much difficulty to the snout of North Terong glacier at 'Tso Camp' (4000 m).

The route ahead again subjected us to the terminal and medial moraine. These Karakoram glaciers had no lateral moraine to give an easy access. We reached the triple junction of the North and South Terong glaciers with the Shelkar Chorten glacier. Our base camp was sited at 'Siab Chushku' (4300 m) on 24 June, 18 km from Pra. The porters were paid off and we were now alone in the valley. Jim and Tony in the meantime had already recceeded the route to 'Doab Chushku' (5000 m), our ABC. The route followed the North Terong glacier for 8 km to a junction where the glacier divided into an eastern and western section. Tony, in his inimitable style described how the camp is located under a buttress. As a result, next day we saw buttresses everywhere and Steve reached a buttress 4 km further. Earlier, the green jacket worn by Steve had given our Ladakhi porters a scare. Taking him to be a spy they had jumped into a nala. We were in the war zone after all.

The only knowledge our Ladakhi porters had of this unknown valley was in the form of a legend. An old man of their village (presumably, a porter with Visser) had narrated the story of Rimo as a shining striped mountain reflecting in the two lakes of the Terong valley. These lakes, according to him, contained poisonous water which no one was allowed to drink. Now our ABC was between these two lakes with clean drinking water. Of course, after a few days, the western lake became poisonous after our morning visits.

5. 'The Karakoram and Turkistan Expedition of 1929-30', a paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society on 23 February 1931 by Dr Ph.C. Visser, *The Geographic Journal*, Vol. 84/4, October 1934.

There was no sign of Rimo yet, covered in a thick layer of clouds. By 28th we started moving up the North Terong (east) glacier. It rose gently to a valley which led in the east to the foot of Rimo I. A camp was established at 5400 m in this 'Ibex valley'. A spell of bad weather followed forcing us to retreat. However, four British climbers and later Muslim and Arun pioneered the route to the 'Ibex Col' (c. 6200 m) on 2 July. This col, like the two other cols reached during the expedition, linked Terong valleys with South Rimo glacier thus crossing the main axis of the Karakoram range.

We now had enough knowledge of the terrain and acclimatization. Hence we decided to get on with the climbs. It was wise to follow the old Indian proverb: 'If a short man goes with a tall one, he will fall sick, if not die'. The British with their vast technical experience were to tackle Rimo I while Indians were to concentrate on other peaks, by no means easy, in different valleys. Thus, nobody was a pain in the neck and we enjoyed perfect camaraderie without the usual tensions of an international venture.

'Doab' (6045 m)

This twin peak rose above our Chushku in the centre of the Terong valley. It was the first peak to be taken on and the last to be climbed. Boga and Mecna proceeded along the North Terong (west) glacier and camped at 5360 m. Dhiren and I joined them the next day and we attempted the peak on the 5th. A col to the north of the peak was reached by 7 a.m. going over a number of crevasses. The route ahead rose steeply to a corniced hump. The overhanging summit lay further ahead on the north ridge. The conditions were not too ideal and hence we retreated 150 ft below and about half a kilometre away from the summit.

But our efforts were not in vain. While others were busy winding up camp for return, Muslim and Harsinh made a three-day push to climb this peak. They established a high camp on SW ridge and reached the summit on 15 July.

'Safina' (5975 m)

An inviting beautiful peak stood opposite our ABC in the east. 'Safina', stood at the entrance to 'Sondhi valley'. Arun and Muslim camped across the glacier on 5 July. Next day they climbed the ever-steepening scree slopes to reach the western snow-ridge. A careful

traverse over the cornices landed them on the first summit of the expedition at 1.30 p.m.

By this time, Henry Osmaston, the remaining British member joined us at ABC. He had cut through the proverbial red tape to travel and trek alone. This geographer bivvied alone on the glacier with only biscuits. He joined us on the 6th and busied himself in studying the ice-penitents and the glacier. Perhaps, since Prof Dainelli in 1930, he was the first geographer to conduct studies in Eastern Karakoram.

Rimo I (7385 m) (Steve Venables Narrates)

'Once we had decided on visiting the Terong valley it was inevitable that Rimo, one of the world's dwindling supply of unclimbed 7000 m peaks, should be a major objective of the expedition. However, we knew little about the mountain; one photo of the eastern side had been published in the 1984 *Himalayan Journal* Vol. 41 but, as far as we knew, no photos existed of the western, Terong side. After all the delays of the approach to base camp, I was longing to discover what the mountain was really like, and on 23 June waited impatiently for Jim and Tony to return from their recce to the upper glacier. They finally appeared at midday, bubbling with enthusiastic, garbled reports:

• "It's wonderful red granite a great plug of granite surrounded by horrible slate terrifying steep buttresses a *Chandelle* like the Freney Pillar must be one of the hardest unclimbed 7,000 m peaks" and so it went on.

The rest of us went up to have a look the next day but saw only isolated bits of rock and ice disappearing into thick cloud. On the 25th everyone went up to settle at advance base. In the evening the clouds lifted slightly and Rimo briefly, coyly allowed us a quick look at the remote, frightening snow-plastered rocks of the south-west ridge. We also had our first tantalising glimpse of Rimo III, but both summits remained hidden and it was not till two days later that we had our first complete view of these two magnificent peaks.

During the intervening two days of bad weather we began to make plans. They centered on the col to the south of Rimo I, which connects the Terong and South Rimo glaciers. I had already named it Ibex Col and hoped to use it to make a circuitous approach to the east side of Rimo III. The British contingent hoped to reach the southwest ridge of Rimo I from the col or the cwm on its western side.

From 28 June to 3 July, as the weather began slowly to improve, there was a lot of traffic up and down the col. They were days of painful load carrying, heavy breathing, probing exploration, wondering and questioning and endless debate, which amongst the British climbers verged at times on the vitriolic. We eventually agreed on a route onto the southwest ridge up snow-slopes on its southern side; we would then follow the crest of ridge from 6400 m to the foot of the "the Pinnacles" at 6600 m. "The Pinnacles" were the major obstacle on the ridge and had to be climbed to reach "the Shoulder" at about 6850 m. From there easy angled snow-slopes led to a fore-summit, beyond which a gap led to the final summit snowfield.

After several days' camping in the cwm at 5600 m we felt ready, on 3 June, to attempt the route and spent several hours packing loads for the climb. Each pair would take one tent, one stove, food and fuel for six days and two ropes. The rest of the climbing equipment would be shared between the four of us.

We left at 1.30 a.m. on 4 June.

Day 1 (4 June)

It all started well: Crampons biting on crisp, frozen snow, luminous under a full moon. In spite of leaden sacks, we made steady rhythmic progress up the slope. As it steepened to 50° the snow became softer and steps began to collapse. By dawn we were above 6000 m where there had been little freeze-thaw effect. The snow became increasingly unstable and as the angle steepened again, rock-slabs started to show through. We roped up to spend eight interminable hours climbing five pitches to the crest of the ridge, a whole day of hot struggle with ever softer, wetter snow and shattered rock. Jim, at thirteen stone, could hardly make any progress, Dave and I hardly fared better and it was finally left to Tony to lead us up to the ridge. His lightness and his experience on unpleasant terrain, perfected over many weekends on the mud and chalk cliffs in England's south coast provided the necessary delicacy of touch.

We reached the crest of the ridge in the late afternoon, exhausted and demoralized and with barely enough energy left to excavate two tent platforms, perched just below the fracture lines of large cornices.

Day 2 (5 June)

It was already clear that we had grossly underestimated the moun-

tain. Originally we had hoped to reach "the Pinnacles" in a day. In fact one day had barely seen us onto the ridge and it would probably require another two days of laborious struggle with soft snow, elaborate cornices and difficult rock towers to reach the distant pinnacles.

I was halfway through the second pitch of the day when Jim shouted across that he had had enough. I went back to the belay to discover that Dave also wanted to descend. I remonstrated:

"But I really want to climb Rimo."

"So do I, but one thing I want more is to live." Dave replied with a touch of melodrama. As far as they were concerned, our route was not only hopelessly long and laborious—it was also plain dangerous. Tony and I agreed that the snow conditions were appalling and that the cornices were dicey, but we thought that with slow climbing and careful placing of rock belays the dangers would be minimised. However, Dave and Jim were adamant and we all returned to the bivouac site and repitched the tents for a day of rest and discussion. It was impossible not to be influenced by Dave's and Jim's dire warnings, and I agonised for several hours before agreeing to continue with Tony. We would take six days' food, which could be stretched if necessary, and gas for nine days. Dave and Jim would take enough gear to abseil and down climb the snow-slope and leave the rest with us.

Day 3 (6 June)

Dave and Jim were fixing up their first abseil as I retraced the previous day's tracks along the ridge. Tony broke onto new ground, traversing towards "the Fortress"—a 50 m high tower which barred the ridge. I continued towards it, scraping and shovelling my way across snow-covered slabs and then working up into a chimney which breached the rock walls. Tony's lead to the top of "the Fortress" was a miracle of delicate climbing; unknown to me, he was climbing a steep wall of atrociously loose granite, 30 m above my head. With supreme care, he avoided dislodging all but one small rock, which only gave my shoulder a moment's pain. I led through to a suitable ledge for a tea break and then, in the hot afternoon sun, we climbed two more pitches to a *breche* between two towers. The snow was getting sticky and we were getting tired, so we stopped to bivouac, pleased with our slow but steady progress and pleasantly surprised that we had actually enjoyed ourselves.

Day 4 (7 June)

A short day. We climbed six pitches along the southern flank, avoiding huge cornices on the crest. Rock belays and the occasional ice-screw provided security. At midday we reached the foot of "the Pinnacles". A snow-shoulder, sheltered below a rock wall, provided a perfect campsite, where we spent a relaxing afternoon, drinking brew after brew and drying boots and gloves in the hot sun.

Day 5 (8 June)

The first glow of sunshine lit up the summit of K2, about sixty miles distant, as Tony started the first pitch of the day. While he worked, I had time to watch the Karakoram come to life—K2, the Gasherbrums, Muztagh Tower, Chogolisa and, much closer, on the other side of the Siachen, those bulky giants—K12 and Saltoro Kangri. It was a wonderful start to a long day of hard climbing.

Hours had been spent at base camp staring through binoculars at the system of snowy chimneys and ramps which bypassed the pinnacles on their north side; now it was time to explore them. Once again there was no relenting of the difficulties and it took twelve hours to excavate our way up eight pitches.

In the afternoon, dark clouds which had been massing in the south, swept towards us and snow began to fall, adding a touch of drama as we climbed the memorable seventh and eighth pitches. The seventh began with a tension traverse which dropped me into a vertical snow-choked chimney. The snow offered no purchase and it was a case of scraping desperately with axes and crampons to find nicks in the rock underneath. The eighth pitch was worse—a prolonged, exhausting nightmare of loose snow on loose rock and, following on a tight rope, I never quite worked out how Tony had managed to climb it.

We were supposed to reach the top of "the Pinnacles" that day, but the last 50 m looked very hard, it was late, it was snowing and I had had enough, so we stopped to pitch the tent dramatically on a huge cornice, 10 m below the belay.

Day 6 (9 June)

The tent was battered by strong winds all night. We assumed that the weather was foul outside and it was only at 7 a.m. that we looked



Rimo South face

out to see a cloudless pale blue sky. After the usual slow breakfast and packing, we were away at 10.30. Three hours later we reached the top of "the Pinnacles". We had passed the worst of the route and, now that we were clear of the rocks, the snow began to improve so that it was actually possible to kick steps and make steady progress round cornices towards the big snow-ramps leading up to "the Shoulder".

Late that afternoon, approaching the top of the ramps, I felt utter contentment. At about 6850 m, it was hard work and I was having to take four deep breaths to every step but the snow at last had a uniform consistency and it was possible to establish a rhythm. It was a beautiful evening and as we gained height the arctic wastes of the upper Rimo glacier came in sight for the first time. If the weather held and if the gap beyond the fore-summit held no insurmountable problems, we might be on the summit in two days.

It was time to stop for the night, so I stopped on the crest of a snow-arête to dig a platform. First I wanted to get the heavy rucksack off my back so I rammed my ice-axe into the snow then took off the rucksack and clipped it into the wristloop of the axe. Before removing the axe-sling from my shoulder, I pulled in some rope to tie off the axe, just in case it should come out. A moment later I turned round to see the rucksack sliding down the slope, unattached; apparently I hadn't clipped it into the wristloop.

I started with incredulous horror at the sack gathering speed, sliding then somersaulting and bouncing and bursting open as it disappeared over the edge to plummet 1000 m into the western cwm. Sleeping bag, duvet, food, tent poles and, most vital of all, the gas stove had gone. One tired, careless move had ruined everything and the only choice was to retreat.

Tony was a paragon of restraint. He didn't utter a murmur of complaint and his only concern was that I should snap out of my hysterical anger and misery and concentrate on the job of getting down alive. We reversed three pitches, dug a platform and suspended the poleless tent as best we could from the belay. The temperature dropped to 30 C and the vicious north wind slapped the loose fabric all night. Inside, sharing Tony's bivouac clothes, we shivered miserably and longed for hot brews of tea.

Day 7 (10 June)

The morning was bitterly cold. It was also brilliantly clear and the

perfect weather seemed a horrible mockery of my incompetence. Our only consolation was that the descent went like clock-work. In seven hours we descended 1200 m to the camp in the cwm. Eight long abseils took us straight down onto the big ice-field below "the Pinnacles". There we were delighted to find good *névé*, which we could downclimb quickly. At the start of the abseils we had been struggling with numb toes and fingers; seven hours later, the cwm was a merciless heat trap. We stopped at the camp for our first drink in 28 hours. The enervating heat and the accumulated tiredness of six days' hard work above 6000 m suddenly took effect and three hours passed before we could persuade our lethargic bodies to repack the one rucksack and continue the descent to advance base.

On the descent I was already thinking about a second attempt. Discovering firm frozen snow on the icefield, we realized that this was the route to take, we could reach the foot of "the Pinnacles" in a day, avoiding all the lower parts of the ridge.

But first we had to rest. The fine weather continued, as we climbed into the western cwm to retrieve my rucksack and then spent two days down at the river fixing ropes across cliffs for Boga's and Arun's return to Siachen.

We returned to advance base hoping that we might be given a second chance. But already the first ominous high cirrus clouds had appeared. The storm, which had been wreaking havoc in the Himalaya for several days, finally reached the Karakoram.

We never got our second chance. Rimo I remains unclimbed and we just have the memory of six days on the ridge, and 33 pitches of the most demanding climbing either of us have done.

'Lharimo' (6070 m)

Activities continued lower down on the glacier too. On 7 July members and porters ferried loads to base of Ibex Col for Boga and Meena to cross next day. They descended the steeper and softer eastern slopes and camped 2 km away. On the 10th, they climbed to a col between their peak and point c. 6120 m at the western head of South Rimo glacier. On the 11th they reached two high points of c. 6120 m each in different directions. Starting early the same night they climbed in starlight to reach the summit of Lharimo in the early hours of 12 July. In the northwest the Rimo group looked magnificent. They recrossed the Ibex Col and were back on the 13th.

'Saigar' (6130 m) and Teram Shehr Ice-plateau

Of an average height of 6500 m was a huge ice-plateau to our north. It drained into the Teram Shehr glacier. A peak at its edge ('Mt Laxmi') was climbed by the Workmans in 1912. It was a fascinating sight whenever we climbed higher. Five of us camped at the head of North Terong (east) glacier intending to find a route up to the ice-plateau, which would link with Col Italia. On 9 July, Jim and Muslim camped high up on the slopes of Pt 6840 m. They undertook a long traverse but were stopped by a dangerous slope. On the return they could recce a not-too-safe gully leading to the ice-plateau.

In the meantime I teamed up with Pratapsinh to attempt 'Saigar' on 10 July. This small but beautiful peak looked up to the Rimo group. Entering the western cwm of Rimo we turned onto a ramp towards the peak. An exposed traverse led to the upper snow-plateau. It would have demanded more time and equipment than we had at our disposal. While on the higher camp here, Jim observed the upper reaches of Rimo I and felt tempted to attempt it from the east. With his appetite whetted, he tempted Dave to join him and left for the higher pastures.

'Sondhi' (6480 m) and 'Sundbrar' (6300 m)

Opposite ABC, due east, was a wide open valley. A highly broken icefall defended the entrance. It continued gently later on to a col. This was the 'Sondhi' valley. Dhiren and I had probed the icefall in the initial stages of the expedition and found it steady. Encouraged by the recce, Arun and Dhiren started on 11 July for the upper reaches of the valley. Dhiren led energetically over the fragile snowbridges. They camped at 5600 m by noon. At 2.30 a.m. on the 12th they started and turned north to reach a col over-looking the Ibex valley. Following the west ridge 'Sundbrar', on the 'Ibex-Sondhi' valley divide, was climbed at 9.30 a.m. The view of the south face and SW ridge of Rimo I was stupendous. On the 13th they started early again and turned east, a little before the col, to traverse to Sondhi peak negotiating steep snow-slopes they summited at 11.30 a.m. overlooking the Sondhi col. They stood on the main axis of the Karakoram.

On the west stood the high sentinels like K12, Saltoro Kangri and Ghent. On the east were the sober brown slopes of Central Asia. They retraced their steps through the icefall to return to ABC after their plucky venture.

With this we had come to an end of the climbing activities in the north. A problem was on our hand. Terong Topko was in spate and had cut off our retreat. An attempt by our LO to tame the Terong ended in a near disaster. Tony and Steve descended and fixed an alternate route with ropes but that was to be the grand finale.

We retraced with loads to BC. Soon we had with us Dave and Jim, and the celebrations for the first ascent of Rimo III.

Rimo III (7233 m)—First Ascent (Dave Wilkinson Narrates)

Jim had been as sure as me about going down. The soft unconsolidated snow on Rimo I had been exhausting and dangerous. At least we had been able to improve Tony and Steve's chances by bequeathing our food to them.

We had invested much time and money in this trip, so our decision had not been taken lightly. Mountaineering decisions are often fine balancing acts, trying to decide where courage ends and folly begins, where is the line between caution and cowardice. At times of contemplated retreat, my mind is often plagued with doubts, great secret battles are fought. The careful self, full of commonsense, wants to survive, and gives a reasoned justification for not pressing on. Opposing is the bold self who craves success, thrives on excitement, and dismisses the other's arguments as excuses for fear and the sloth of advancing years. Such inner conflicts are often fiercely contested. But not on this occasion.

The consequences of the poor snow were reason enough for retreat, I had other good reasons too. My usual nagging high altitude cough was worse than I had ever known, I was producing infected sputum. A finger had suffered in a minor stumble into a stream on the glacier one night the previous week. This was still causing considerable pain, and protracted hard climbing was a daunting prospect. A subsequent X-ray in England revealed a badly comminuted (splintered) fracture. This was not known at the time, but it didn't feel good.

Back at camp, I spent a frustrating few days in good weather, the throat responding to antibiotics, the finger showing slower progress. Jim had a bare week before he had to go home to work. My bold inner self was starting to nag again. The weather was near perfect. We both felt the need for action.

From our base on the North Terong glacier, the two main mountains of the Rimo group looked equally impressive. Rimo I irregular

but steep all round, and Rimo III more symmetric but also devoid of any easy line. My finger and Jim's time shortage seemed to rule out any major action here. We could opt for a smaller easier mountain, but during my days of inactivity, I had formed a more speculative notion. We had a picture taken the previous year by the Indian Army from the South Rimo glacier, on the other side of the range. This showed the east face of Rimo I and its subsidiary peak, Rimo II. It appeared to be a little easier than our rear side. However, the photo was not a close-up, and we were not sure. Did we have time for a try? I made my proposal to Jim, and he jumped at it with the alacrity of a man who had similar ideas already. We would leave early next morning with a week's food and gas, and what little climbing equipment we could carry.

We had to cross the Ibex Col at over 6200 m, descend the far side and then do our climb which we hadn't even seen yet. We had time for only a single quick dash. I also had a "B" plan in my mind, which I didn't disclose yet. Harish's army map showed an easy ridge on the far side of Rimo III, not that we could be sure of the map's accuracy, but...

That evening, Steve and Tony came back from Rimo I, and told about the dropped sack and all. During my enforced illness, I had scoured the mountain with binoculars, vainly trying to follow their progress and come to terms with my worried feelings towards them. What a fine effort. hope they succeed. Envy—why am I not up there? Hope the mad fools fail. Now this admiration and jealousy were overtaken by relief to see them safe and well.

Curiously, their sudden return did not alter our plans at all. They could do no more without a good rest, and Steve was short of a few items, so there was no question of their joining us.

After the euphoric planning, the horrible reality returned with the night-time stumble up the glacier shouldering a monster load. Curse that Fotheringham, why is he so fit, as I struggled to stay within earshot. "Sorry Jim, have to have 5 minutes". First light saw us at the site of the camp below the Rimo I attempt. The weather remained clear, but a bitter cold wind brought out gloves and duvet jackets to comfort numb fingers and ears. A gruelling ascent to the Ibex Col opened up a romantic vista to the east, like a traveller's tale from Tolkien.

The white expanse of the South Rimo glacier stretched out before us. Beyond, as the big mountains ended, the hazy brown of the Dep-

sang plains, with the shining silver ribbon of the Chip Chap river where goes the old trade route to the Karakoram Pass, and over into the Sinkiang province of China.

The descent down our branch of the South Rimo glacier was easy, but as fatigue took hold, my legs felt like mechanical appendages, carrying me on, but not totally in my control. We rounded the corner at the glacier junction, and immediately found a delightful camp-site on a crystal gravel bank of moraine beneath Rimo I's east face.

As we brewed and ate the day to its close, we had ample time to look at our objective, but didn't need long. A glacier face gave a zig-zag line between seracs to a prominent terrace at two thirds' height. From here a choice of Andean finishes was available to the top of Rimo I: A steep fluted face, or narrow corniced ridges on either side. The adequacy of our food and time or my digital ability were of no consequence—one rope and a handful of iron-ware were clearly inadequate equipment.

The slightest glance towards Rimo III showed a gentle snowy northeast shoulder. Whether Jim had also previously had this at the back of his mind, I do not know. In any case, he agreed to this change of plan with remarkable speed and flexibility.

Sacks were lightened by dumping some food for the return journey, and also leaving some of our already sparse hardware. This lightness seemed less evident next morning, as we crawled up the glacier branch between Rimo II and Rimo IV. The threats of serac fall from either side of this narrow way produced no startling turns of speed from us; but the threats were of some use, as they encouraged us not to stop for our next camp until the glacier widened a little, and our way went off right up another glacier branch between Rimo III and Rimo IV.

Next morning, we had our first view of the col between Rimo IV and our ridge on Rimo III. We had a route decision to make. The easy line to the col itself was abandoned, as some rock pinnacles appeared to complicate the first part of the ridge. We chose instead a bigger and steeper snow-slope further left, which led to our ridge above all obvious difficulties. When we tried to climb this slope, it proved to consist of chest deep snow with the texture of confetti, so it was also abandoned for mixed ground just on its right. This gave 250 m of alpine DETD. The rock sections were very pleasant, but the snow had not consolidated much since our Rimo I attempt. Contrary to normal, the worst snow was found on the steeper ground, presumably because it

was less exposed to the wind, or because it lay awkwardly on top of the rocks.

Above this section, we cut a vast camping platform into the easy ridge, and I made a vague effort to emulate Steve by dropping my Karrimat. This camp must have been at or over 6700 m, so only 450 m to 600 m of easy ridge remained. We felt confident of success the next day.

We set off early with light sacks, but still managed no great note of ascent. Altitude was making itself felt more and more, several panting breaths being required between each uphill step. Even so, steady progress was made, and it seemed that only the weather could stop us now, for dark clouds were gathering. However, these seemed to be of the 'slow to anger' variety, the main threat was to our summit views. A narrow corniced section of the ridge was mercifully short, some rock towers were easily passed, and only a Mont Blanc type snow-shoulder remained. At over 7000 m, the body was pressed to find enough oxygen in what remained of the planet's shallow atmosphere. It was a case of step up, six deep breaths next step. . . The technical anticlimax of this ridge was countered by the fight for air, and the exhilaration of ever widening views coming and going between the gathering clouds.

At last we stood on the corniced top; but had to wait several minutes for the view to clear momentarily, first one way, then the other, to be sure we were actually there. One such clearing gave a dramatic glimpse of Rimo I and II close at hand, with a great banner cloud streaming in the wind.

Then I remembered something. In Bombay, Harish's son Nawang had given me a small flower in a tiny envelope asking me to place it 'on top of a mountain', some sort of a Hindu tradition. I could not ignore such a simple and charming request, so I placed it carefully in the highest snow, without knowing its exact significance. Later, we learnt from the Indians that its purpose was to bring us good luck.

Reaching the top of a mountain is not, in the event, the great thrill which the layman might imagine. The main feelings are exhilaration, relief that it's over, and worry about the descent. As he sat on our highest ever summit, Jim summed up this anticlimax with a casual but telling remark, "Shall we go now? There's nothing for us here".

Shortage of pitons caused problems on the descent of the steep section, but adequate anchors for abseil appeared when most needed.

We even descended off a rucksack accessory-strap, and an ice-screw driven into a rock crack. The weather deteriorated slowly. As we reached the Ibex Col, snow fell gently. We returned to camp 2½ days after leaving our summit, and it snowed heavily that night. We had been on the go, glacier travel, reconnaissance, and climbing an unexplored mountain, for 6 days, well served by Nawang's little talisman.

Exploring South Terong

With this Tony, Jim, Arun and Boga left for home. Meena stayed at BC after an unsuccessful attempt to cross 'the Ropes'. Visser had visited the North Terong and Shelkar Chorten glaciers and surveyed the former. No party had ever entered the South Terong glacier. Hence, for the last few days we decided to be the first humans there—a rare feeling.

Dhiren, Harish, Dave and Muslim proceeded to the South Terong snout (5 km) on 20 July. Keeping to the true right they aimed for a non-existent lateral moraine shown on the map. The scree was hideous and the going utterly bad. Camping in a small clearing at 4800 m they proceeded to the centre of the glacier on 21st. A long ice-tongue gave us smooth access to 'Darrah Chushku' (5000 m). A magnificent sight, a junction in the middle of nowhere covering the entire vista of the glacier.

Dhiren and Harish turned to the broad eastern branch. In 6 km they climbed 500 m without a single crevasse to camp at 5500 m. A valley in the north led to Shelkar Chorten glacier. On the 23rd they reached 'Terong Col' (5720 m), 4 km away. On the east another gentle valley descended to South Rimo glacier. Thus over very easy terrain, it connects Siachen-Terong valley to Rimo-Shyok valley. At the same time Muslim and Dave crossed over from the Darrah camp to the left bank. Muslim and Harsinh climbed up a small valley and stood on the broad 'Warshi Col' (5440 m). It descended to North Warshi glacier and down to Warshi village in Nubra. Thus a route can be traced connecting Warshi (in Nubra) to Daulat Beg Oldi in Shyok. This would take four days over Warshi and Terong cols instead of a circuitous route over Saser la (5330 m). Next day, Muslim investigated the southernmost sections of the glacier.

With our explorations completed, we gathered at BC, but where was Steve?

Shelkar Chorten Glacier, 'Chorten' Peak (6050 m) and 'Ngabong Terong' (6180 m)

Wyss and Khan Sahib climbed the Te Rong Glacier to map out its neighbourhood, Franz Lachmatter and I penetrated over the huge Shelkar Chorten Glacier into the high mountain range.

In contrast with the glacier branch which Wyss and his party were exploring and which was lying in a deep valley, ending in steep rock walls, our glacier found its origin in a big firn field, surrounded by high snow mountains.⁶

So wrote Visser while exploring this glacier. Now on 21 July Steve was camping on this firn field—alone. Coming over the broken icefall took two days and he reached 'Shelkar Col' (5800 m) at the head, which led to the Darrah camp. He climbed 'Chorten' peak to the north of the col. He had good views of two more cols including the Terong Col reached by Dhiren and Harish. He descended to the South Terong valley on the 22nd and turned SW, one valley after the valley leading to Warshi Col. His aim was to climb an inviting twin summit peak with a snow-arête.

Steve Venable's Narrates

'Ngabong Terong' was neither a long nor a particularly hard climb but, because snow conditions become lethal by mid-morning, it had to be staged over two days. The first day I climbed up the side glacier and a 50° snow-ice (slope) to a huge bergschrund at 5800 m. By 8.30 a.m. I had pitched the tent inside the bergschrund and settled down for a long, lonely wait.

At dawn the next day I was on my way up the snow-arête. I stopped three metres below the east summit—a large, unstable cornice. Looking across to the west summit, I had to admit reluctantly that it seemed slightly higher. A horrible 300 m traverse on sugary ice, round the south side of the cornice, led to the easy connecting ridge and by 7.30 a.m. I stood on the camel's second hump which was indeed slightly higher (6180 m).

For a few minutes I savoured my last chance to look out over the hundreds of unclimbed peaks of the East Karakoram, which already

6. Visser, *ibid.*, p. 283.

were smothered under the spreading cloud of another storm. Then I hurried back round to the eastern hump and descended the arête, already sludgy in the first heat of the day, and at 10 a.m. crawled back into my cave to spend an interminable day dreaming of human company and brown bread and Stilton cheese.

The longing for company and the vivid fantasies about food grew more intense on the sixth day, during a purgatorial descent to base camp. After twelve hours of slithering and stumbling on boulders, under a grey drizzling sky, I arrived at a bleak, deserted camp. The others had left a note and a huge kit bag to add to my already considerable load. I finally rejoined them the following day at the Terong river.⁷

Return

With this our time in the Terong valley was over but not the adventure. Due to the flooding of the Terong Topko no porters were expected and we carried loads to 'the Ropes'. Ahead was a scary and exposed traverse on the rock wall above the river. It was hard work and crossing the numerous ice-streams with floating ice-blocks was painful. Finally the loads were ferried across a provisional ladder put up by our LO from the other side. As a climax we had a porter strike and a monumental sulk from our LO. 'It's his problem'—Dave dismissed it in his usual style. By 27 July evening we were at Pra and on our way home.

Concluding the lecture by Visser at the Royal Geographic Society it was said:

We have listened to a lecture full of the liveliness which distinguishes Dr Visser: a most delightful lecture, in very correct English, in which I dare say, he has even corrected a current English expression insofar as he has proved that to give someone a "Dutch treat" can sometimes also have a pleasant meaning.⁷

Five and a half decades later, the Indo-British experience was equally a *treat*, completing the thorough exploration of 'that valley'.

7. Visser, *ibid.* p. 294.

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East of Saser La

Exploring Aq Tash and Chong Kumdan Glaciers

1989

LIKE MANY GOOD expeditions, ours began with problems. There are always too many bureaucratic obstacles on the way to climbing in the East Karakoram. This time we had a few added difficulties which almost ruined our trip. To begin with, our flight from Delhi hovered over Leh and due to the cloud cover landed us back at Chandigarh. We flew to Srinagar with all the luggage. Muslim and Vijay were packed off with it in a truck. They suffered-out a three-day journey with road blocks, drunken driver and the other usual hardships. The rest travelled by a bus. We all gathered at Leh 5 days behind schedule on 6 July 1989. We contacted the army and everything seemed to be in order.

On 7th evening as we roamed about in the streets of Leh eating *kababs* there was a small riot, and suddenly a furious mob attacked a gompa and masjid which were situated opposite each other. The police intervened, and this was the start of the four months of riots which were to change the face of Leh. The Buddhists of Ladakh and Shia Muslims were protesting against Sunni Muslims from Kashmir who had cornered the trade. There were bomb blasts and Leh was put under total curfew for 3 days. 'This must be the first violence in Leh after the days of Zorawar Singh' (1840), one Ladakhi scholar said sadly. The army staged a flag march and we could finish our purchases during the breaks in the curfew. Leh looked different, desolate and tense. How sad for this Shangrila which we had enjoyed so much in the past. When we returned in late August not a single tourist was around. It was an eerie atmosphere, with insecurity rampant in the streets. But luckily late in the year, in November, a settlement was

reached and an uneasy calm returned.

We managed to leave Leh at last, after 8 days, on 13 July in a private truck. Quickly we went across Khardung la (5602 m) and enjoyed an excellent view of the northern ranges. We left Shyok at Khalsar and turned into the Nubra valley and approached Sasoma. We found a truck stuck in the nala, the poor drivers were stranded in it. We threw some food across to them and spent the night in the open. Next morning we prepared a diversion and cleared our truck. Sasoma was reached in time for breakfast with the army there. This 158 km route took 7 days for caravans in the early days to cover, but now it is a one-day journey. The road ahead leads to the Siachen snout and army convoys pass in both directions with monotonous regularity.

Subedar Raftan, who was in charge of the camp at Sasoma, welcomed us with a firm handshake but discouraging news. We required 12 to 15 mules for crossing the Saser la. First, due to the uncertain weather, the pass which was feared by muleteers, was open only intermittently. Secondly, a large army expedition to Mamostong Kangri on our route had acquired 125 mules. No other mules were available in the Nubra valley. So all we could do was to wait. Our days were spent quite interestingly with the jawans and subedars, all veterans of the Siachen war. There was a relaxed routine here. It involved some office work, telephone messages and preparation of food for the convoys. Evening was spent playing a volleyball game. The air in the hall was filled using a prunus-stove. The night was, of course, 'filled' with rum. Some of us visited Yarma gumpa (also known as Charsa gumpa) which is believed to be as old as the Potala. Nubra river on the map is marked after this gumpa as 'Yarma Tsangpo'. There is still the tradition of painting the walls and stones in the Nubra valley by lamas and these painting sites are known as 'Goomfa'. The valley itself was beautiful and full of flowers and poplars, living up to its original name 'Dumra' ('valley of flowers and trees') now changed to Nubra.

Finally, after 5 days the mules arrived and what a happy sight it was for us. Mules were loaded and we left on the 20th, having finished our third delay and ready to face the fourth. The track climbs *chhatis mod* (thirty-six bends). A route is hewn over a tough rock about 550 m in height. It takes 36 U-turns and reaches Tulum Puti la (3750 m). It is a masterpiece of road making by an engineer Ali Hussain who was sent from Central Asia. When the pilgrims on their way to Mecca complained of hardships at this place on the route, the

Sultan of Yarkand in the 19th Century had despatched a brilliant engineer to construct this well-engineered track with local materials. If this sounds improbable, even more fantastic is the route to the valley ahead leading to the base of Saser la. This is unique, considering the terrain involved. This is what Eric Shipton wrote of the area, which has not changed much:

From the fertile valley of Panamik, the track climbed a slab of rock, 2000 feet high, so steep and smooth that from a distance it looked scarcely passable for a mountain goat. Beyond it we entered a wilderness of rock and ice surrounded by lofty peaks and by the evening of the second day we reached the foot of a glacier cascading in a series of steep ice-falls from the Saser Pass (17,480 feet). The only way through was up a narrow gully of large moraine boulders between the ice and a vertical cliff. Though this type of ground is familiar enough to any mountaineering expedition, never before had I dreamed that it would be possible to climb it with heavily-laden animals. There was no vestige of a path, and as the ponies clambered up the great boulders, their hooves scraped and slithered agonisingly in their efforts to gain purchase and retain their balance on trembling, bleeding legs.¹

Ahead of Tulum Puti la we followed the river, crossing it at Umlung over a natural rock bridge. Above it were the plains of Lama Kheti. We crossed the Thangman nala to make a camp (4050 m). We continued along the river, crossing the Lashi and Namlung nalas which come from the south. Each of these nalas drained the glacier of the same name. Each glacier has a number of peaks upto 6500 m. Only Lashi (6265 m) has been climbed. One of the high cols lead on the Chamshen group of peaks which drain into Shyok and are otherwise difficult to approach. All these glaciers are a store-house of peaks for future climbers. After the open ground of Turtyalak, the track climbed up 280 m to Skyangpoche. Mamostong Kangri glacier was opposite us in the north. Yarkandi travellers had tried to find a way through this glacier across a col to avoid the much feared Saser la

¹ Shipton, Eric, *The Untravelled World*, p. 143.



Tulum Puti la track

(5395 m). They crossed the col at 5885 m to Thangman glacier (Kichik Kumdan glacier). This would have led them quickly to the Chong Kumdan glacier and the Karakoram Pass. But the party perished and the glacier and the col were called Mamostong—of ‘thousand devils’ and the ‘glacier of medicinal herbs’ (Thangman). We camped ahead at Changmolung nala. The rains arrived, and that was our fourth problem. It rained heavily for the next two days, almost as in Garhwal. The weather in Ladakh is surely changing. Gone are those days of constant blue skies and dry weather. Clouds can gather anytime and it rains quite heavily. The heavy rain in the fragile Ladakh landscape has a devastating effect and is not always welcome. It is difficult to point out any reason for this change, though some blame the large plantations in the lower valleys of Ladakh. But as we learnt to our chagrin on this trip, weather in Ladakh cannot be relied upon. But the army is very business-like and operates in any weather. They have a simple saying as Subedar Wani had later put it:

Mausam ka ulla nahin
Hukum ka jawab nahin
 (You cannot rely on the weather,
 you cannot reply to an order)

On 24 July we could move at last, with the muleteers already grumbling. The route became wilder and steeper. Another aspect was added which all the earlier travellers had written about.

In the valley leading up to the Pass we had seen first of the corpses, skeletons and heaps of bones which formed a continuous line of hundreds of miles until we reached the first oasis beyond the ranges.²

These skeletons made a gruesome sight but soon we got used to them. Even today many mules die on the pass and you have to pay compensation for them. The army can afford it but a private expedition has to be careful in pressing the muleteers too hard. We camped about 2 km before the pass, at a usual camping ground used before crossing the pass. The condition of the weather on the morning you have to cross the pass is crucial. If it is cloudy the snow does not consolidate hard enough and mules will sink in. As it is one has to make a mid-night start, which we did. But after one hour the mules were

2. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

sinking in the snowfield. Our ponies began to weaken and many were limping and several kept collapsing sadly and hopelessly. There were blood marks on their legs. We had to stop. Back we went to the camp. Now we were stranded once again, for the pass was not open yet. The only way out of our fifth problem was to ferry our loads to the crest of the pass and arrange for mules from the other side to pick them up. This we had to do for the next 3 days. It was a gallant effort by the team and it almost appeared that we were engaged in a desperate attempt to establish a high camp, rather than travelling on a trade route.

Bad weather did not leave us and we could see the wisdom of Francis Younghusband as to why this pass is so much feared.

The Saser Pass was not so difficult at this time of year as it often is. But on the day after we crossed it a terrible squall of snow and rain overtook us, and on looking back I saw the pass hidden in a cloud as black as night; and it is because of these terrific storms that the pass is so much feared.³

Finally on 26 July we left at 1 a.m. with torches. It was a clear night for a change and walking on the snow was a pleasure. The route went over the scree to the final ice-wall. It traversed across the wall to a plateau above. It is surprising how mules can at all go on such a route, as it was like something one encounters on a mountaineering expedition. When you felt concerned about safety of a mule, the muleteer always reassured: 'This is a *sharif* (gentleman) horse. He knows where to place his legs. He won't fall.' These sturdy beasts-of-burden, the Karakoram mules, are legendary. They have played no small role in supporting trade, travel and now defence in this area. A small temple on the eastern side marked the end of the pass, which was about 3 hours from our high camp. A steep descent to the Shyok valley led us to Saser Brangza camp.

Subedar Dorje and Subedar Wani greeted us warmly. The former was in charge of the camp while the latter introduced us to many wise sayings and to the BBC Urdu news bulletins to which he listened without fail. All these soldiers had experience of living more than a quarter century in the area and knew it like the back of their hands. They talked of extreme winter, different routes, life at altitudes and of

3. Younghusband, Sir Francis, *Wonders of the Himalaya*. p. 131.

course about the war. But surprisingly no one bothered about the peaks, glaciers, mountaineering history or early travellers. Even in the present day a mountaineer-visitor can still explore, gather knowledge about unknown valleys even though people have now lived here for decades. Mountaineers here are not totally useless and a pain-in-the-neck as sometimes it is thought.

The army at Saser Brangza loaned us mules to get all the luggage down from the pass. They further agreed to loan us mules for two days—(but strictly for two days only) to reach our proposed base camp at Chong Kumdan glacier. We had to go upstream along the Shyok river and cross two major streams on the way. This route is a short cut to Gapshan and the Karakoram Pass and is regularly in use. The river is fordable till the Chong Kumdan dam in all seasons and beyond that only in winter. By this time we were all quite tired and depressed. To make our cup of misery full the mules stopped at the first difficulty; the crossing of Aq Tash nala. It was flooded and as the night was cloudy the water did not recede next morning. The mules could not wait and we had to make our base here. Finally the sixth trouble had stopped us. We were exactly one month away from Bombay and still 5 km short of our proposed base. We wondered what would have been the reaction of Westerners if this was a joint expedition. None of the difficulties we faced could have been solved quicker or by better organization. All these were part of the game of climbing in the East Karakoram. In spite of all the support, how could we have stopped the rain, changed the terrain or forced the bleeding mules? As it is said 'You can change history but you cannot fight geography.' We bore it with oriental fortitude, while a foreigner in a hurry may have been angry and impatient. But how that would have helped?

The Skeleton Trail

The track we were travelling was the famous Central Asia Trade Route. This historic route was the main trade route between the plains of India and Central Asia. In his autobiography, the great explorer Sir Francis Younghusband wrote:

The crossing of the Himalaya by the main caravan route to Central Asia over the Karakoram Pass is about as dreary a piece of travel as I know. The part through Kashmir is delightful. After that, and especially over the Karakoram Pass itself, the scenery is inexpressibly dull and as much of the route lies at an

altitude of about 17,000 feet, and the pass itself is nearly 19,000 feet, there is a good deal of that depression which comes from high altitudes. And even in August the temperature was low enough at night for small streams to be frozen. It is a hateful journey.⁴

His observations were not far from the truth. Almost all the early travellers suffered this way. Diana Shipton called it 'The Headache Mountains', while all the bones of Ngabong (double humped camels of Central Asia), men and mules earned it the name of 'The Skeleton Trail'. The route carried heavy traffic. It was used by the Yarkandis on their way to Mecca. They had to return before the winter, and many were trapped and died. Robert Shaw and Hayward were the first foreigners to pioneer this route in 1864 followed by the two Forsyth missions. Andrew Dalglish was the other Englishman to cross it and he was murdered north of the Karakoram Pass. He was buried at Leh (near the Stoliczka memorial) and a small plaque put up a little north of the Karakoram Pass where he was murdered. Dr Ferdinand Stoliczka, a naturalist attached to the Forsyth mission, died at Murgo in 1874. He was buried at Leh and his monument stands proudly even today. A common bird in the area is named after him: 'Stoliczka's Bush Chat'. Literally hundreds of travellers frequented this route including Ney Elias, Godwin-Austen, Eric Shipton and Ph. C. Visser. After 1946 the route was closed by the Chinese once they had a stranglehold on Central Asia. Finally in 1962 a small force of the Indian army was driven back from east of Saser la, and some returned via Chong Kumdan and Saser la to Leh. The area far to the east is Aksai Chin and under Chinese control. The Indian army now controls the Shyok valleys and travel is strictly regulated.

The two expeditions allowed before ours were the Indian Sappers team, which climbed Rimo IV in 1984 and the Rimo expedition led by Col. Prem Chand.⁵ They travelled by the trail to Daulat Beg Oldi (D.B.O.) and Rimo glacier, the latter returning via the Chong Kumdan snout.

At Saser Brangza, east of Saser la, the track descends to Shyok. From the south the winter route from Darbuk and Mandalthang joins it. Towards the north goes the route via Chong Kumdan to Gapshan

4. Younghusband, Sir Francis, *The Light of Experience*, p. 54.

5. Hillary, Peter. *Rimo and H.J.*, Vol. 41, p. 117.

and D.B.O. The summer route crosses Shyok to Chhongthash and Murgo to turn north to Burtse and Depsang plains. These plains are a unique feature and extend for many kilometres, and are now bordered by the Chinese on the east. This is what Sir F. Younghusband wrote:

Of all parts of the world this is the most God-forsaken—dreadful in any way. The plain itself is over 17,000 feet above sea-level, and consists of an open expanse of gravel, bounded by rounded, dull, barren hills. Across it incessantly sweep winds of piercing cold To add to the gloom the plain is strewn with the bones of animals who have succumbed to the strain of carrying loads at these great heights.⁶

Finally all the routes meet at D.B.O. and cross the Karakoram Pass, which is quite unspectacular compared to the terrain already passed. Ahead, over the plains of Central Asia it joins the famous Silk Road at Yarkand, running east-west. (Though silk was traded on the Central Asia Trade Route, it was never called the Silk Route. It is a feeder to the Silk Road.⁷)

The Indian army officers who are stationed in the area have done extensive trekking. Many relics have been found, like the metal boat, perhaps of J.P. Gunn, left in 1929 in the Chong Kumdan lake, memorial stone of Visser expedition of 1935. Burtse stones, remains of caravans and of course bones and few partly decomposed bodies. Some of these have been air-lifted to army HQ at Partapur lower down on the Shyok and are preserved for posterity. Government agencies, geologists, archaeologists and surveyors operate in the area and have collected much information and relics. Few are preserved at Leh and others at different museums. Books and papers on the area are published in scientific journals.

But the final word on the trail is so well expressed by Shipton:

Nothing is known of the men who, centuries ago, first ventured across this monstrous wilderness in search of trade or conquest. It is easier to imagine the toil, hardships and frustration they must have endured than to understand what inspired the courage and tenacity needed to discover a way.⁸

6. Younghusband, Sir Francis, *Wonders of the Himalaya*. p. 132.

7. See *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* by Peter Hopkirk.

8. Shipton, Eric, *The Untravelled World*. p. 144.

l. It overlooked the entire Shyok valley here and gave a bird's eye view of the Kichik Kurmdan river-block of yesteryears. They examined the possibilities of climbing the adjoining peak of 6225 m but found the

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6. Younghusband, Sir Francis, *Wonders of the Himalaya*. p. 132
 7. See *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* by Peter Hopkirk.
 8. Shipton, Eric, *The Untravelled World*. p. 144.

Exploring Aq Tash Glacier

Considering the time available to us, and our limited strength, we had to improvise. The alternate plan was for Arun and Muslim to enter the Aq Tash glacier, 8 km long, and to try out peaks there. Accordingly on 31 July they climbed via the right hand moraine and crossed the glacier to make C1. This glacier has prominent white stones giving its name (Aq—white, Tash—stone). As the Yarkandi caravans passed at its snout they must have given this simple identification, as in this land of 'Karakoram' (black rock) an Aq Tash itself attracts attention. For the next 4 days Arun, Muslim and the porters established two camps to reach the col at 6200 m on the shoulder of the peak Aq Tash (7016 m). This was 'Col 62'. On the other side it offered excellent views of the Thangman glacier (Kichik Kumdan glacier). The entire massif of Mamostong Kangri could be viewed to advantage. After the 'Mamostong Col' the entire route on the glacier and the east ridge of Mamostong Kangri (7516 m) were observed. But the most challenging view was of the peak Aq Tash (7016 m) lying to the southeast of the col. The ridge rose sharply and was broken. This is one of the last three unclimbed 7000ers in the area and is a stupendous monolith. It would take a strong, all out attempt to climb it. Arun and Pasang proceeded northeast of the col following the ridge. They stopped on the sharp 'Aq Tash Tower' c. 6400 m. Soon they all retreated to the base camp on the 8th for a rest leaving all their campsites intact.

After two days Muslim and Pasang returned there to continue their efforts on the Aq Tash glacier. Their first aim was a peak 6090 m above their C1 (5200 m). It took them 7 hours to reach the summit on 12 August. The route went up a nala draining from the north and via a snow-gully. A series of false summit humps had to be overcome. The final climb was of 150 m to reach the summit which was christened 'Lokhzung', (6090 m) ('Eagle's Nest'). To the south of Aq Tash glacier two small glaciers lead to the ablation valley. On the southernmost valley stands 'Chathung Thung' (5645 m) ('Black necked crane') with a lovely snow-slope and black-rock jutting up like a neck on the top. On the 13th they established a camp below this peak. On the 14th they overcame three pinnacles to reach the true summit. It overlooked the entire Shyok valley here and gave a bird's eye view of the Kichik Kumdan river-block of yesteryears. They examined the possibilities of climbing the adjoining peak of 6225 m but found the

slopes avalanche-prone. So by the 16th they were on their way down and towards the Chong Kumdan glacier to unite with the main team.

Chhongthash

After Arun and Muslim had left for Aq Tash glacier I started suffering from high fever. When contacted, the nearest army doctor arranged mules for my evacuation to their camp with Monesh. From the crossing point on Shyok, on the other side they mounted horses equipped with wooden frames which were made for carrying luggage. A painful journey began. The route entered the Chhongthash gorge.

The Saser Pass led us again into the Shyok valley, 160 miles upstream from the place where we had crossed it near Panamik. Instead of following the valley we plunged almost immediately into a ravine, so narrow that the opposing walls also met 1000 feet above our heads, so dark that we seemed to be in a vast cavern.⁹

We were now in this cavern. Ladakhi troops marching with us were fit and a confident lot. 'Who needs bullets here, we can just throw stones from above, they joked. Chhongthash (big stone) was a huge plain with a big rock in the centre, the only one in miles. Ahead you can see the barren fearsome mountain walls of Murgu. As strong winds and clouds gathered a battered Harish and suave Monesh were greeted with:

*Ladakh ke mausam aur
Bombay ke fashion ka bharosa nahin.*
(Ladakh's weather and Bombay's fashion
cannot be trusted).

The army was friendly, comforting and literally warm with *bukharis*. Four comfortable days were spent under the expert care of the army doctor. After sufficient rest, drugs, video films and the warmth of friendly people, I recovered sufficiently to return to the base camp on Aq Tash glacier.

9. Shipton, Eric, *The Untravelled World*, p. 144.



Chong Kumdan glacier.

Chong Kumdan Glacier

We all gathered together on 9 August, riots, weather, terrain, sickness and mules had effectively left only 11 days now to visit this unknown glacier. We divided ourselves. Muslim and Pasang continued to climb in the Aq Tash glacier while Arun, Monesh and Harish with three porters left for the Chong Kumdan glacier.

There was a good beaten track leading to the glacier. Aq Tash nala was now crossed easily and we trekked along the Shyok bed. The river flowed majestically and very quietly. Thangman nala (old Kichik Kumdan) was crossed with some difficulties and by evening we camped at the plains leading to the historic dam. Arun and Koylu Ram tried to cut across the ice-penitents of the Thangman glacier with disastrous results. It was tiring and they barely managed to cross it. It is a hard task to cut across these pinnacles and walls of about 50 m. Thangman or Kichik Kumdan (small dam) had also blocked Shyok in the past and we could observe a deep gorge near the eastern wall where the river had broken through. Now of course the glacier has receded at least 2-3 km and would pose no danger. Thangman (Kichik Kumdan) glacier is 1 km long and an expedition led by Maj. A.M. Sethi traversed it fully to climb Mamostong Kangri.¹⁰

The Glacier Dam

This is the meeting point of Chip Chap river from the north and Chong Kumdan river from the west. The Chong Kumdan glacier had advanced rapidly over the years and pressed against the opposite eastern walls. A little higher up, the glacier takes a sharp turn; the movement of mass was so forceful that it pressed hard against the walls. This blocked the flow of Chip Chap and Kumdan river. (The earlier literature (gazetteer) called it 'Kumdan river'.) However, a glacier is liable to retreat and weakened by the retreat, water broke the dams and bursts occurred. All the dammed water rushed out and death and destruction had been caused right up to Attock Fort, about 1200 km downstream. Hence, the river acquired the name Shyok—the river of death. Such dam-bursts have occurred in 1780, 1826, 1835 and 1839. It had been a regular feature for many years. The dam-waters rose for about 125 m at the peak and the water marks can still be seen. The dam was studied by Ney Elias and Godwin-Austen in 1877. Kenneth

10. *H.J.*, Vol. 46, p. 70.

Mason, the first editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, took keen interest in this dam.¹¹ He collected a large amount of material, and made observations and diagrams about it. The major dam-burst occurred in 1929 Mr. T. Durgi of Public Works Department was then posted at the dam-site to warn against a future burst. In 1932 he sent two runners to Khalsar over the Saser pass to warn people about the floods. Flood waters had already reached Khalsar, but by this phenomenal fast trek (130 km in 28 hours) they did pass on a warning. Kenneth Mason calculated the frequency of advance and retreat of Kichik and Chong Kumdan glaciers. He predicted:

As I shall not be here to be proved wrong, I will be precise. The Chong Kumdan will advance rapidly during the winter of 1968-69; the Shyok valley be blocked; a lake will form above it, some 10 miles long; and there will be floods caused by the collapse of the dam in autumns (July to September) of 1971, 1974 and 1977, the first one occurring probably in the autumn 2½ years after the glacier has advanced.¹²

However as per all the available records the last major burst which caused destruction occurred on 16 August 1929. Since then minor bursts have taken place in 1932-33 and 1937-39. The dam waters escaped slowly in these cases and no major damage was caused. But no bursts of dams have occurred after that. The Karakoram glaciers in this region are in a state of retreat. Indian forces are stationed in the area since long and their records of the Shyok water-level do not speak of any floods.

Is it likely Mason may still prove correct about the future?

It must be remembered that it will be a coincidence that the Chong Kumdan and the Kichik Kumdan glaciers will both be at their maximum advance at approximately the same time (1970) and that at their subsequent advances, the Chong Kumdan in 2013 and the Kichik Kumdan in 2005, they will again be "out of phase". We can perhaps leave any further speculation to our grand children.¹³

11. *H.J.*, Vol. I., p. 14.

12. *H.J.*, Vol. XII, p. 62.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Chong Kumdan Peaks

Though the trade route and many caravans passed at the snout of the glacier no one seems to have entered inside the glacier. The Chong Kumdan glacier was first surveyed by E.C. Ryall in 1862 and a sketch-map published by the De Filippi expedition in 1914. It is about 15 km long running east to west generally. To the western end lies a high col of 6250 m leading to the South Terong glacier. On the south lies the high Mamostong Kangri wall with many high peaks that discharge avalanches. To the north of the glacier are the two unattempted peaks of Chong Kumdan I (7071 m) and II (7004 m). A high col (6500 m) between the two overlooks the northern branch of the Chong Kumdan glacier. After about 3 km from the snout the glacier bifurcates with the North Chong Kumdan glacier leading towards the South Rimo glacier. At this junction where both the glaciers meet it takes a sharp bend and thrusts ahead to the walls opposite.

On 11 August we entered this glacier. We followed the right moraine. A side glacier had cut through creating a narrow gorge hence we had to climb up to go across it. It opened to our views the entire northern vista up to Gapshan Valley which had reddish slopes and the site of the old lake with marks on the side walls could also be clearly seen. We moved ahead but after about 2 km were forced to descend to the glacier moraine and proceed along it. After the junction of the glaciers we cut across to the north towards the left bank. We camped on the glacier late in the evening. Next day ABC (5040 m) was made on the flat camping ground at the entrance of a small subsidiary northern glacier, christened 'Chogam glacier' by us. While two porters were sent down to ferry more loads we went up this northern glacier quickly. On the left bank of this glacier a moraine slope climbed steeply avoiding the lower broken glacier. Col was placed at 5540 m below a prominent 'Dimple' on the ridge on the 14th. Arun and Koylu Ram left early with their camp followed soon by Monesh and me. We reached a prominent col at 5900 m ('Col 59'). Ahead to the NW was Chong Kumdan I (7071 m). It rose from the glacier to a col, then to steep rocks and a tempting rounded summit. The eastern ridge fell sharply to join our peak.

Sir Francis Younghusband was perhaps the first to see it from a distance on his way to Central Asia.

There followed some dreary marches across the summits of the base and desolate Depsang Plains



Chogam, Skyang and Laknis peaks

from which, through 17,000 feet above sea level, the snowy peaks of Saser and Nubra 'appeared above the horizon like sails of some huge ships'¹⁴

Nursing a recent fracture I found the steep slopes painful to climb and hence opted out. The remaining three followed the steep southern slopes of the peak 6250 m. After climbing a pinnacle at the end they were on the summit of 'Chogam' (6250 m) ('a box of holy scriptures'). The entire panorama was filled with Rimo in the northwest to Mamostong Kangri in the south.

On 15 August, Arun and Koylu Ram climbed 'Stos' (6005 m) ('goat which gives Pashmina wool') from their high camp. It is a peak between the descending ridge of Chong Kumdan I and 'Chogam'. They had a clear view of the surrounding peaks and glacier.

16 August was our last day of action. Early that morning Monesh and Yog Raj left to climb 'Skyang' (5770 m) ('wild horse') above our ABC to the north, with the energy and speed matching the name of the peak. Going up steep slopes the summit ridge was reached by 9 a.m. There were three pinnacles spread over half a kilometre on the summit ridge. To be absolutely sure, they climbed all three. The bend of the glacier and the dam were clearly seen. That evening we made a huge cairn and on a stream 'constructed' our own dam. Exactly, 60 years ago to the day, 16 August 1929, the Kumdan dam had broken with a bang and was heard by the Vissers camped at D.B.O. ('like the noise of a cannon-shot' almost 30 km away) and by J.P. Gunn who visited it immediately from Chhongthash. This was the last major burst of a lake which had formed in 1923. Godwin-Austen, who was crippled at the age of fifty, died that year at eighty-seven. A little before he had written in *The Times*, which had just reported another block of the river, vividly recalling his visit to the dam with Ney Elias forty-three years earlier.¹⁵ After 1935-39 both Chong Kumdan and Kichik Kumdan went into oblivion and did not cause further blocks or news.

Muslim and Pasang after their satisfying climbs met us at the Chong Kumdan plain. A tired but satisfied party exchanged notes. We were fascinated with the area and even charmed by its barrenness. As Shipton had said:

14. Seaver, George, *Sir Francis Younghusband*. p. 106.

15. Morgan, Gerald, *Ney Elias*. p. 126.

As on a long sea voyage, many weeks in the mountain wilderness, remote from the habits and concerns of our former world, had made us intensely sensitive to our new environment.¹⁶

A tired party staggered back across Saser la. Subedar Wani had reserved the final quote for us:

*Kaun Kaheta hai ke Mehboob mera
Langda ke chalta hai;
Woh to husn ke boz se
Lachak lachak ke chalta hai.*

(Who says my (mountain) lover is walking with a limp,
Because of the load of love (beauty)
he is staggering a little).

16. Shipton, Eric, *That Untravelled World*, p. 145.

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Chong Kumdan

1991

HAPPINESS, VERILY, is a relative concept. Some expeditions are born happy, some achieve it and some have happiness thrust upon them (with due apologies to the popular quote). There are few, like ours, which had all the three.

As for the birth, we had a good lineage. In 1985 we had climbed with Dave Wilkinson. Now he selected a British side which would understand all the problems and be most compatible. Paul and Lindsay were the experienced lot who had seen many grey areas like Ladakh. They formed such a natural pair that it was a surprise to learn that they were climbing together for the first time. John Porter had the grace and polish required to have taken on Changabang, K2 and Everest. Dr. Bill Church was strong. He had a legendary appetite which put the porters to shame. The 'appetite' included peaks as he notched up 5 first ascents on the trip. Neil with his great sense of humour and agility had a correct approach for such areas, 'To climb, I would have gone to the Alps, I am here to experience'. And of course Dave was around to mix them all well with his experience. He arrived early at Bombay to purchase and pack and left last after polishing off dishes at all the local restaurants! On our side most of us had climbed together. Muslim, Bhupesh, Vijay and myself had the previous experience of the area and were attracted to Ladakh. Of Dhiren and Ajay, the newcomers, the former had many trips to his credit but due to a leg injury could not make most of the trips, while the latter had good climbs.

It was important to have a happy team for the East Karakoram area recently had been notorious for differences of opinions between the joint teams to put it mildly. Various joint expeditions landed in problems caused by the delay due to permit problems and personality

clashes. If one expedition was 'called-off' too soon, the other had a language barrier. Some could not climb due to the war, some due to the delay in permission to the area. Finally one expedition to our area had almost a 'machine-gun' experience leading to a furore. We were keen to avoid any such mishaps. If we had differences, we Indians settled it in the vernacular and if the British had to survive on dal-bhat (rice and lentils) for a few days it never led to swinging of ice axes.

'Before mastering it, you have to mistress it', my Yoga teacher always said about the *asanas* (poses). So, after such a birth we started working on the next stage of 'achieving it'. With all papers, instructions and contacts in place we still had some hiccups at Delhi. Muslim stayed behind to collect the papers while the main team left for Manali to join Dave and Lindsay. They had just conducted a course for the Indian climbers in lieu of the expedition peak royalties. In a special bus we left on the luxurious ride along the most scenic, if rough, road to Leh. Going through high passes and spectacular views we reached Leh on 6 July 1991.

At Leh all the memories of our 1989 trip here came rushing back. Riots, bomb blasts and curfew had kept us in the hotel for 8 days. An uncooperative army and mules delayed us further 5 days. Finally nature also turned against us on Saser la and Aq Tash nala, to reduce us to 9 wickets down with only the slog overs to go! In the final available week we managed to climb 5 peaks to gather knowledge of the Chong Kumdan group and the glacier. We returned wiser but having lived a bad dream.¹

With such an experience, one would not wish to return here. But we were drawn to it with all the possessiveness of *Carmen*. One would hate to see any other expedition preceding us here. We had to return, it would have been like being an infidel not to. But we always wondered about the outcome. Would we be defeated like Bizet's *Carmen*? Or finally possess that momentary satisfaction of climbing it? We had to take the bull by the horns.

Muslim was present at Leh having flown there with our permits valid for only three weeks ('Why do they need longer permits—to build a house?'). A Delhi-babu could not appreciate the intricacies of time here. We applied for an extension and left Leh in just two days. Our liaison officer Capt. Arun Pandey was a paragon of understanding

1. See *H.J.*, Vol. 46, p. 76, 'East of Saser la', for full details of the 1989 trip and the full history of the area.

and co-operation. He arranged all the army matters with great efficiency and carried the heaviest of loads—unlike the breed of LO's who sometimes refuse to carry their own socks. He contributed a lot to the efforts and became a good friend.

After a 158 km journey in two trucks provided by the army, we reached Sasoma. Unbelievable as it may sound, the mules were waiting (they actually charged us for waiting a day) and everything was set. We started on the 12th for the journey across Saser la (5395 m). It was a cake-walk this time, and without much problem we turned along the Shyok. If in 1989 we had the taste of Younghusband's and Shipton's problems on Saser la, this year we crossed it with an army-like ease. The weather had much influence on the terrain here, explaining our ease and the historical fear of the pass. Now with a motorable road being blasted till the foot of the pass, the skeletons of mules spread around will be the last ones seen.

Finally we were nearing the Kumdan plains. A half km wide rocky patch had to be made fit for the passage by mules. Next day, 18 July, the mules climbed up along the moraine of the Chong Kumdan glacier and deposited us about 2 km away from the proposed base camp. Dave quickly led the party across to establish us near a small grassy patch which was, as if waiting for years for us to camp on. For some of us had reached here in 1989. Our quick arrival contributed towards the climbs and happiness in no small measure. 'At this rate we will have tourists in bermudas here and we will be serving pakodis (fried snacks) to them': was the cryptic comment by Muslim recalling our previous experience.

We started to ferry the loads to BC from the dump. That done, we settled down to climbing, to what Paul called, 'till the mules come here'!

We had decided to climb as each one wished and in any style and combination. Thus each had a base, a group and a wish to act on. After every few days, we returned to the base to delicious *Gulab Jamun* (sweet meats) eaten with great aplomb and noise! The kitchen was in a huge parachute-tent and everyone gathered to savour Dave's Sphagetti Bolognese. You had to be quick about it, for if you enter little late with an empty plate sure enough you would hear Bill's request, 'Any seconds going?' The talks revolved around many subjects like alpine-style vs. traditional, altimetres, the British climbing scene, Indian politics, amidst shouts of *Macau* taught to us by John.

Chong Kumdan V (c. 6520 m) and IV (c. 6520 m)

Our first success came in the next two days. As a recce and acclimatization, a large party climbed *Chong Kumdan V* (c. 6520 m) on 22 July. It was a two-day affair going up the SE ridge. The route traversed ice-mixed ground and afforded a good recce of the south face of peak I. Immediately after this, *Chong Kumdan IV* (c. 6520 m) also received a first ascent. Dave and Bill left BC to enter Chogam 1 glacier. The same day they reached the foot of peak IV, which is situated on the NE ridge of peak I. Going up the east ridge they climbed up steep ice and mixed ground. At first they carried a tent up hoping to camp ahead to have a closer look at the eastern and NE approaches of peak I. But they found the ground too steep, so leaving the loads behind they climbed the peak on the 26th. Within a week we had two of the Chong Kumdans climbed.

While these peaks were being climbed, an Indian party was proceeding along the main glacier establishing camps in the traditional style. A camp at 5450 m after the entrance of Chogam glacier served as ABC, called 'Polu camp'.

Polu campsite was dominated by the wall of Mamostong Kangri (7516 m). Its north wall rose more than 2000 m from the glacier. Everyday it presented a spectacle of a giant avalanche near midday. It fell quite majestically. You hear it, rush, take out your camera, take a picture, wear a jacket and await the snowfall. Once the plumes rose up almost 500 m. But it never caused us any harm.

With porters ferrying loads it was intended to build up a chain of camps into the Chogam 3 glacier to try peaks around the cirque at its head. Variety of combinations and movements went on while we were establishing camps. Paul and Lindsay went ahead to Chogam 3 glacier followed by John and Neil. Muslim, Pasang and myself probed right into the main glacier towards Nup col (c. 6250 m). After the initial approach, we landed in a huge crevasse-field and no easy approach to climb to Nup col seemed possible. Moreover even if reached, the Nup col or the Chogam 4 glacier, both did not offer any possible route to Chong Kumdan II (7004 m). Even after a look from the north, this peak offered us no easy route and was the only peak of the group not tried or climbed by us.

Kichik Kumdan (c. 6640 m)

As we regrouped and turned to C1 (c. 5900 m) at the entrance of

the Chogam 3 glacier, Paul and Lindsay were climbing Kichik Kumdan (c. 6640 m). This deceptively easy-looking peak was tamed in style by them. The northern side fell precipitously to the Central Kumdan glacier with cornices hanging out. The snowy south face contained hard ice underneath. They climbed the south face to the east ridge. Keeping a few metres below the cornice they had to traverse on ice front-pointing on crampons. After the mixed ground, they reached the summit. Looking for an easier return they decided to traverse the peak along the west ridge. But after almost 6 hours of hard ice work, they managed to reach the west col and returned exhausted to their bivouac. Their experience had carried the day.

Chong Kumdan III (6670 m) and Chang col (c. 6500 m)

Crossing Paul and Lindsay, we established our C2 (6300 m) on 31 July. Muslim and myself were to stay for 5 days here participating in many events surrounding this camp. First with Pasang and Tikam Ram we reached *Chang col* (c. 6500 m) on the 2nd. Situated on the NW shoulder of peak I, it had a huge bergschrund at its foot. Above this was a steep ice-slope. Looking to the north, we saw the peaks and the Kumdan glaciers which we were to explore in the later half of our expedition. On 3 August Muslim, Pasang and Tikam attempted *Chong Kumdan III* (6670 m). Going up steeply they reached the west col with Kichik Kumdan. After failing on the north side, they went up the NE ridge. Higher up soon they landed in powdery snow and crevasses. Going ahead would have been risky. They returned to the camp by afternoon, having reached 70 m short of the summit.

As we sat in the afternoon heat, four tiny dots came up from the horizon. We knew it was time up for Chong Kumdan I (7071 m). Soon Dave, John, Neil and Bill joined us. I couldn't resist asking them questions on the tape-recorder. 'Why they were off to Chong Kumdan?' John: 'It looks about as stupid as most of the mountains I've climbed. I am here only for the view!' Bill: 'I hope the air is a bit better up there'. Neil: 'Well I am hoping that our alpine style ascent will continue with tea stops from porters and fixed camps and if I am tired, may be you can send Pasang ahead to place ice-screws and make tea on the summit!' Dave: 'What can I say, I am not very good at these off-the-cuff interviews. I came to this remote place and there is a journalist wanting to know my opinion of things. I would sooner climb the peak to get away from it all'.



Chong Kumdan peak, Southwest face.

Soon four figures disappeared towards the bergschrund near the Chang col and bivouacked. As the evening turned Mamostong Kangri red, we were puzzled by another three figures coming from below. Soon Bhupesh came in view followed by Ajay and Arun. They had a story to tell. Having laid around too long they left C1 at 1 p.m. as they had the British route to follow through the crevasses. However, half way they changed the lead and the route. Soon after Ajay fell into a crevasse. Luckily Bhupesh arrested his fall with a quick reflex putting in only the tip of his ice axe. Arun, who was third on the rope released himself and checked out Ajay who was dangling at the end. He pulled up his rucksack and Ajay then came out of the hole with the help of crampons, shivering with cold and badly shaken. Now the delayed party was safely up.

The night was cold, but we were up by 4 a.m. Sure enough four small head-lamps were going up the west face on a perfectly clear day. It was exciting to see them and we followed their progress to the summit, reached at 10 a.m. One of the major giant virgin peaks of East Karakoram had been climbed in the alpine-style and we watched it all. Something to tell our grand children!

Chong Kumdan I (7071 m)

Dave recorded the following on tape later on about the climb of Chong Kumdan I.

We woke up at 2 a.m. and were on the climb soon. You must be seeing only three headlamps going up. That's because John's eyes are so good that he can see in the dark! It was a partly moonlit night and one could see better without the lamp. Bill led through the bergschrund followed by the others. We unroped not to waste too much time and the ropes trailed on to save the trouble of coiling. We reached rock outcrops which we thought would give some steeper climbing but they didn't. Little ahead was a snow-slope, a sort of old wind-slab. Bill was ahead by 15 m from John. The slope made a creaking noise, as if it was hollow underneath. We went to the left and then it was much more secure. We roped up again and took a couple of belays on ice-screws a little before the first light reached us. The ground eased up

ahead and we unroped again. We then carried on diagonally to the ramp. I selected the longer ramp and led up. The ramp was about 60 m, very cold and it ended on the NW ridge on a ledge. John had persisted with the other ramp and led up on horribly loose ground and Neil had a worried time showered by stones. But luckily the rock was so rotten and broken that Neil was not hurt. 'Neil's Knocks' were not serious, just lots of them. They came on another ledge ahead of ours.

After half an hour, we delightfully climbed up along the NW ridge. It varied in angles, little steepening, flat and steepening once again. Not very heavy exposure as it was not a single crest, it was between the rock-outcrops on the right and snow on the left. A gangway between the two and at varying angles and snow-conditions, with a view of the summit looming ahead. A wisp of clouds blooming up was the summit. For the final short section Bill put on the rope just in case the summit was a big cornice, but it wasn't and was reached at 10 a.m.

We saw the party on the summit and were shouting to them. It was an exciting feeling to see them on that virgin top. 'What did you feel, Prof Wilkinson, when you reached the summit?'

How was one to get down from here? The view was absolutely superb with mountains all around. Depsang plains was about the only place where there were no peaks. I never imagined there were so many good peaks in the area, particularly towards the Siachen. I should have remembered having seen them from the top of Rimo III in 1985. We were aware of the fact that we have climbed a peak of one of the last of the unclimbed 7000 m group.

For the descent we said 'Help send the fire-brigade.' Till down to the ledge, it was straightforward. Wind had kept the snow better. We tied two ropes together and an abseil would take three people out of the ramp and the rock fall. The last one would have to descend. So muggins got the job and I

climbed down the ice on the ramp. From the bottom we decided to come back by a different route, across the west face. The traverse was easy but tedious with knee-deep snow, there was no risk of it going down. We reached the tents at 3 p.m. completing 13 hours on the mountain.

Glad we managed to do it before anybody else littered it with fixed ropes. Our kind of style was the victor, how much can be put in practice on high mountains. Of course unfortunately we had to make our own tea half way up the mountain!

With the chief object fulfilled, there was an air of camaraderie at BC as we all gathered on 5 August. For the next two days everyone relaxed and talked. John and Dhiren left for home. But we still had two weeks before the mules came back. A fully acclimatized and relaxed party divided again into many sub-groups.

Chogam (6250 m), *Stos* (6005 m) and *Skyang* (5770 m)

The first scene of Act Two I remember is Captain Arun Pandey dancing. He had just climbed Chogam. He had worked hard for the expedition and always wanted to go above the 6000 m height. In fact this peak, which we had climbed in 1989, became popular with 5 ascents. Lindsay and Bhupesh climbed it solo on different days. On 15 August, Indian Independence Day, Dave joined me on the summit with the Indian flag, Stos (6005 m) was climbed twice and Skyang (5770 m) once.²

Laknis (6235 m)

But in between this plethora of climbs, we had a week long exploration of two Kumdan glaciers towards the north. Proceeding along the Central Kumdan glacier, we had to sit out a two-day snow-fall, the only touch of grey on our month long stay at BC. 'Laknis' (6235 m) was a fine peak in between the two glaciers.

Eight of us followed its never ending ridge. ('Fine Scottish hill walk') and the final rocky outcrop. From its summit both the glaciers and the Rimo group were seen to a great advantage. Most of us returned to BC while Bhupesh, Muslim and Pasang left towards the head of the Central Kumdan glacier

2. For route details of these peaks, see *H.J.*, Vol. 46, p. 86.

Proceeding ahead with one camp on the glacier they reached a col at its head, 'Chong Ibex col' (c. 6000 m). It led down to the South Terong glacier. Muslim and Harsinh had reached below this col from the South Terong glacier in 1985. Thus he looked at the familiar terrain, linking the passage between both glaciers. To the north, the North Kumdan glacier led towards Terong col (c. 5720 m) reached by Dhiren Toolsidas and myself in 1985. Thus our knowledge of the area and exploration was now complete.

Kumdan Terong (6456 m)

Bhupesh: We were very tired a day after the ascent of Laknis and left at 9.30 a.m. We decided to work in 'shifts', start early in the morning stop at noon and sleep after lunch, get up at 3 p.m. and be ready for the 'second shift'!

Muslim: On the second day we moved on the left of the glacier going on the crevasses. We had expected the col to be far away but we reached it in an hour (Chong Ibex col). The view was wonderful and brought back all the memories of my walk on the South Terong glacier. The descent was gentle and we were tempted to go down to Terong and Siachen.

Bhupesh: We were up by about 2 a.m. on August 15 and moved out soon. We got up a hump crossing the long snowfields. A great vista opened up. The initial part till a bergschrund was gentle and we gained height quite fast.

Muslim: Ahead was quite a steep ridge covered with steep scree and patches of hard ice. It was a case of one step up and two steps down. Bhupesh was not at ease and the going was very tiring. We turned the ridge and found the rotten rocks held on by ice, with great exposure, between the 3rd and 4th pinnacle a route led to the summit. On the return Bhupesh had a rock-knocking on his head and was held by a belay. That hurried us back to BC.

But back at BC Neil and Bill had reserved the last trombones. They decided to climb 'Landay' (6170 m). Entering an unnamed glacier full of deep crevasses opposite BC, they were established at the

foot of this peak. Two of them left early in the night and followed a route of sustained difficulty climbing up the west face and the north ridge. We could see them all along while climbing Skyang opposite.

Landay (6170 m)

Neil: Originally I was in two moods, whether to wind down or climb, nothing bigger though. Anyway Bill had other ideas and in retrospect these were the two best days of the whole trip. He tagged me along, I was relying on his enthusiasm.

Bill: In fact it was quite a problem getting a tent pitched on the glacier opposite. It was quite tricky to go across the crevasses, at one point we climbed in and out of a crevasse or through the mud on the edge of it. Next day, 16 August, we went up 60 m steep snow (about 40 degrees) across the bergschrund and followed the north ridge of the summit. There were many glaciers seen all around. The view was excellent towards Chong Kumdan I and Chogam. We thought that on the way down we could traverse across to have an easier descent. But there was no route across the bergschrund. So we came back and crossed it almost 10 m from where we went up.

The only taste of disappointment, as we neared the end was the failure of an attempt on Chong Kumdan I by Paul and Lindsay. Braving out heavy snowfall Paul had taken ill.

Second Attempt on Chong Kumdan I

Paul: When everyone left for North Kumdan glaciers, we decided to go to Chong Kumdan I on our attempt. Weather turned bad and we sat out two days watching avalanches pouring from Mamostong Kangri. When the weather cleared, we went up to camp a little ahead. Finally we moved up to pitch tents near the peak only to find that the weather had become worse. We made a quick dash down to our last camp and BC where everything had flattened out.

After debating for a day or two, we decided to

make a wild dash to the peak. So we went up to the last camp with everything once again conscious of the fact that we had been caught up by bad weather before and not much time was left. It was quite a difficult snow-condition. I did not feel really steady enough to manage the final climb, which would have been almost solo climbing. And how much conditions on the mountain had changed. We would have been in for a dangerous climb, particularly on the return. Lindsay explored the approach from the NW ridge direct but found it tricky. With extreme reluctance, we returned and I suppose it is some comment on our state that we had been on the go for 20 hours out of 27. It's one of those lessons. You really never learn them!

Lindsay only said, 'A 7000 m peak route on a plate so to say, but it did not work out. This was not a place to wander around on your own, there were too many holes up there and somebody was particularly not feeling all that well, and I think those things are much more important!'

Team spirit at its best!

We all withdrew to the Kumdan plains. In fact if the mules were to come a week later, we would have climbed a dozen more peaks or so. Now we walked around the historic Kumdan dam site.³ The mules came in time and very quickly and uneventfully (except for a dash in the rain) we were back to Leh.

Everybody joined Paul, sans his famous beard, in laughter. Glasses of beer and momoes saw to it that the final 'thrusting of happiness' on us was total. On the final night we ordered *Gushtaba* and *Tabakmas* on the streets of Leh. In the dark deserted streets loud music was playing in the car of our friends in typical 'Bombay style'. We too had played Fidelio to our mountain, and, like Beethoven's opera, not failed.

3. Full details about the dam site and its history with photographs are covered in *H.J.*, Vol. 46, p. 85.

Eastern Karakoram: A Historical Review

1992

THE EARLY EXPLORERS knew no boundaries except those of mountain ranges. The present day mountaineers and explorers have to be confined by political boundaries and territorial regulations. It is significant, hence, that only since 1984 all the ranges of the Eastern Karakoram are now opened to climbers by the Indian Government. While planning for the Siachen Indo-British Expedition, 1985 to the Terong valley, initially one felt that the area is not frequented, remote, information scarce and approach difficult. However, upon a little research it was found that more than forty parties had visited the area. The information and various references were scattered over a large number of books and journals. It is intended, in the present article to gather all this information, not exhaustively, but substantially. Eastern Karakoram has many opportunities for climbing and exploration and it is bound to receive many mountaineering parties in the future. In the early days, caravans from Srinagar to the Siachen snout took nearly fifty days and now it would be a five day journey!

The Eastern Karakoram consists of (a) the Siachen Muztagh, (b) the Rimo Muztagh and (c) the Saser Muztagh as a sub-group of the Great Karakoram.¹ All these groups consist of various subgroups and peaks as classified in the Karakoram Conference report of 1936. Out of these the Siachen Muztagh was explored thoroughly, while the Rimo Muztagh and Saser Muztagh received a few parties.

1. 'Karakoram Nomenclature' by Kenneth Mason, *H.J.*, Vol. X, 1938.

The Siachen Muztagh

The peaks surrounding the Siachen glacier basically form this group. In 1821, W. Moorcroft passed near its snout and first acknowledged its existence.² In 1835 G.T. Vigne approached it from the west trying to reach the Bilafond la, but he never guessed the existence of such a large glacier across the divide.³ In 1848 Henry Strachey was the first to discover the existence of the 'Saichar' glacier and ascended it for two miles from the snout in the Nubra valley.⁴ In the same year, Dr. Thomas Thompson⁵ also reached the glacier followed by F. Drew in 1849-50.⁶ E.C. Ryall of the Survey of India sketched the lower part in 1861. But he ascribed to it a length of only sixteen miles. During his famous second Karakoram journey in 1889, Sir Francis Younghusband approached over the Urdok valley to reach Turkestan la. Looking down to the Siachen from the north he felt that this was the main axis of the Karakoram.⁷ This was finally confirmed by Dr. T.G. Longstaff in 1909.⁸ In fact, it was Dr. Longstaff with Dr. Arthur Neve and Lt Slingsby who were the first real explorers to traverse this great glacier. First, they came over the Bilafond la (or, Salto pass, as Dr. Longstaff would have preferred to call it) and named the opposite glacier as 'Teram Shehr' and peaks as Teram Kangri, after a Yarkandi legend. After retreating to Nubra valley, Dr. Longstaff came up the Siachen snout from the south and saw the same peaks as identified from Bilafond la. Thus, he conclusively proved the length of Siachen glacier and the actual location of the Turkestan la. This was an important discovery as it now established the true boundaries of the Karakoram. He wrote:

Younghusband was a true prophet. Col Burrard of the Survey had suspected the truth. The avalanche-swept pass, whose foot Younghusband had reached 20 years before, was on the main axis of the Karakoram range which thus lay miles farther north than had been believed. We had stolen some 500 sq miles

2. *Travels in Himalaya* by Moorcroft and Trebeck.

3. *Travels in Kashmir* by G.T. Vigne, Vol. II, p. 382.

4. *Geographic Journal*, Vol. 23, p. 53.

5. *Travels in Tibet* by Dr. T. Thompson.

6. *Jammoo and Kashmir Territories* by F. Drew.

7. *Wonders of Himalaya* by F. Younghusband.

8. *This My Voyage* by Tom Longstaff, pp. 160, 192.

from the Yarkand river systems of Chinese Turkestan, and joined it to the waters of the Indus and the Kingdom of Kashmir.

The next most important explorers were the famous Workman expedition in 1911-12. They entered over the Bilafond la and camped on the glacier with a large entourage of porters and two Alpine guides. They visited and named Indira Col, after Goddess Laxmi. In a month long survey they climbed many peaks and visited almost all corners of the upper Siachen.

Grant Peterkin was a surveyor attached to this expedition. He surveyed the glacier thoroughly and named a few peaks, particularly Apsarasas and Ghent.

In 1929 Dr. Ph.C. Visser of the Netherlands was on his fourth trip to the Karakoram.⁹ They discovered the two Terong glaciers and the Shelkar Chorten glacier which were unknown till then. Dr. Rudolf Wyss and surveyor Khan Sahib Afraz Gul stayed in the Terong valley and mapped the area. Thus they completed surveying the lower part of this great glacier.

At the same time, in 1929, the Duke of Spoleto expedition (Italian) crossed the Karakoram by Muztagh pass and reached Indira col from north. They descended from Turkestan la after discovering Staghar and Singhi glaciers. In 1930 Professor Giotto Dainelli completed the survey and exploration of this area. Coming over from the south he established himself at the Teram Shehr junction in early June; '... thus reaching the Siachen tongue with all my baggage, a caravan of seventy coolies and six and a half tons of food for the men, carried by an additional caravan of ponies and supplementary coolies. On the 9th of June—exactly two months after my departure from Florence—I was heading for my first depot up the glacier. I hope my English colleagues will appreciate this rapidity of execution, which I consider a record!'¹⁰ Compare this with the present timings! Dainelli, with his only companion Miss Kalau, stayed at the Teram Shehr junction and carried out various geological surveys. Due to the flooding of Nubra, he could not return by the same route and hence crossed a 6200 m pass to Rimo glaciers in the east. He named this Italy Col

9. 'The Netherlands Karakoram Expedition', 1929 by Jenny Visser-Hooft, *HJ.*, Vol. III, p. 13.

10. 'My Expedition in the Eastern Karakoram, 1930', by Prof Giotto Dainelli, *HJ.*, Vol. IV, p. 46.

(Col Italia). With this, the survey and exploration of the Siachen in most major respects was over. It was now left to climbers to attempt the various high peaks in this area. These climbing activities are tabulated at the end of this article.

All these recent expeditions arrived at the Siachen glacier from the west over Bilafond la or Sia la. In 1978-80 and 1981 Indian Army teams entered the glacier from the Nubra valley in the south and made excellent ascents. In 1984 a Japanese team approaching Rimo from the west over Bilafond la was turned back. India had firmly taken control over the area stopping all accesses from the west and north. From 1985 this area is selectively open for climbers approaching from Leh and Nubra.

The Rimo Muztagh

The Rimo glacier which is the main source of the Shyok has received very few visitors or climbers. Its end had been only roughly sketched by Johnson in 1864 and Robert Shaw in 1869. Sir Filippo De Filippi expedition of 1914 explored this great glacier and its feeders, thereby connecting with the Peterkin survey of 1912. Next in line was the Indian Army Engineers' expedition, after 70 years, in 1984 which climbed Rimo IV. The Siachen Indo-British Expedition of 1985 crossed over from the Terong valley to climb Rimo III. They narrowly failed on Rimo I. The Terong group (North and South Terong glaciers) and the Shelkar Chorten glacier were also thoroughly explored by this expedition (55 years after Vissers). In all eight peaks were climbed and various passes and cols reached linking the Siachen/Terong to Rimo/Shyok valleys. They approached from Siachen glacier thus linking both Muztaghs.

Mamostong Kangri was first explored at close range by Dr. A. Neve and was surveyed by De Filippi's expedition. This peak was ascended by an Indo-Japanese expedition in 1984 approaching from the south over the Mamostong and Thangman glaciers.

The Saser Muztagh

Saser Kangri area was first reached by Arthur Neve in 1899. In 1909 and 1922, the Longstaff and Visser expeditions reached it respectively. The main reach was carried out by J.O.M. Roberts in 1946. He reached all the peaks of Saser and surrounding areas. In 1956 an Indian expedition led by N.D. Jayal, in 1969 led by C.S. Nogyal and

in 1970 by H.V. Bahuguna, failed to climb this peak reaching high on Cloud Peak or Saser IV. Both Roberts' and Jayal's teams climbed the nearby 'Look-Out Peak'. The first ascent of Saser Kangri was made by an Indian team led by Joginder Singh in 1973 approaching from the Shyok valley in the east. An Indian Army team led by Col Jagjit Singh made the second ascent of this peak.

An Indo-Japanese expedition led by Hukam Singh climbed the west peak of Saser Kangri II (7518 m) in 1985. This expedition approached from the Nubra valley and climbed the northwest ridge over a col.

All the other groups in this Muztagh have not been visited and await exploration.

A Philistine may question the validity of all these 'explorations'. With the Central Asia Trade Route passing through these areas many local traders have known the terrain for years. Prof G. Danelli puts the Eastern Karakoram explorations in the correct perspective:

Someone might philosophize on the illusion we live in, we who believe we are exploring and discovering that which other men, instead, have known before us, perhaps for centuries. But we explore and discover for the sake of general knowledge and of science, and we cannot feel diminished if only in this sense be understood the discovery of the Yarkand source from the Rimo, made sixteen years ago, or the so-called first crossing of the col between Rimo and Siachen.

For geography and for science, as well as for alpinism, it has certainly been the first crossing.*

* A Journey to the Glaciers of the Eastern Karakoram: A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society (RGS) on 11 January 1932, by Professor Giotto Danelli, Accademico d'Italia. *Geographic Journal*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 4, April 1932.

History of Siachen Muztagh (1821-1992)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1821	W. Moorcroft passed near the snout and reported its existence.	2
1835	G.T. Vigne approached it from the west over Bilafond la but never guessed its existence.	3
1848	Henry Strachey discovered the existence of Siachen glacier and ascended it for two miles.	4
1848	Dr. T. Thompson visited the snout	5
1940-50	F. Drew approached the glacier	6
1862	E.C. Ryall—Survey of India, sketched the lower part and ascribed it a length of only 16 miles.	—
1889	Sir F. Younghusband reached Turkestan la from north and looked down on the glacier.	7
1907	Sir Sidney Burrard published a map on Himalaya. It did not include Siachen though he mentioned the possibility of a large glacier.	14
1908	Dr. Arthur Neve and D.G. Oliver reached the snout and explored Mamostong Kangri	10 GJ 38
1909	Dr. Tom Longstaff, Dr. Arthur Neve and Lt A.M. Slingsby, later joined by Capt D.G. Oliver, first came over Bilafond la and later over the Siachen snout to establish the length of the Siachen glacier and exact location of various passes.	8
1911-12	The Workman Expedition came from west, named many peaks and passes and climbed a few peaks. Grant Peterkin surveyed the glacier thoroughly	9
1911	V.D.B. Collins and C.S. McInnes of Survey of India surveyed Teram Kangri and other peaks.	10
1913-14	Sir Filippo De Filippi surveyed Rimo glacier system and published a map.	13

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1929	Dr Ph.C. Visser, Netherlands expedition, surveyed Terong valleys and crossed the snout to Gyong la.	<i>HJ</i> , III, p. 13
1929	Duke of Spoleto expedition reached Indira Col from the north and discovered Staghar and Singhi glaciers.	<i>HJ</i> , III, p. 102
1930	G. Dainelli, Italian expedition, stayed two months at Teram Shehr junction and crossed Col Italia	12
1934	G.O. Dyhrenfurth, International expedition, made first ascent of Sia Kangri.	<i>HJ</i> , VII, p. 142
1935	British Expedition led by J. Waller with John Hunt attempted Saltoro Kangri.	<i>HJ</i> , VIII, p. 14
1939	Lt Peter Young visited Gyong la on shikar.	16
1956	Austrian expedition led by F. Moravec climbed Sia Kangri West.	<i>HJ</i> , XX, p. 27
1957	Imperial College British expedition led by Eric Shipton climbed Tawiz and visited passes.	<i>HJ</i> , XXI, p. 33
1961	Austrian expedition led by E. Waschak made first ascent of Ghent.	<i>HJ</i> , XXIII, p. 47
1962	Japanese-Pakistan expedition led by T. Shidei made first ascent of Saltoro Kangri I.	<i>HJ</i> , XXV, p. 143
1974	Japanese expedition led by T. Tanaka attempted Sherpi Kangri II via S ridge.	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 4
1974	Austrian expedition led by W. Stefan climbed Sia Kangri from SW.	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 5 <i>AAJ</i> , 49
1974	Japanese expedition led by G. Iwatsubo approached K12 from the west. Two members summited but died on the return without any trace.	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 4
1975	British expedition led by D. Alcock attempted Sherpi Kangri.	
1975	Japanese expedition led by Y. Yamamoto climbed K12 by the same route to search for the missing summiters. The search failed.	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 16

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1975	Japanese expedition led by H. Kata- yama made first ascents of Teram Kangri I and II, coming over Bilafond la	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 17
1975	Japanese expeditions led by S. Yama- moto attempted Saltoro Kangri I	<i>HCNL</i> , 31, p. 17
1976	Japanese expedition made first ascent of Sherpi Kangri, led by H. Hirai.	<i>HJ.</i> , XXXV, p. 254
1976	Japanese expedition led by H. Misawa made the first ascent of Apsarasas I	<i>HCNL</i> , 32, p. 20
1976	Japanese expedition led by H. Sato came over Bilafond la crossed Tur- kestan la and made the first ascent of Singhi Kangri from north.	<i>HCNL</i> , 32, p. 19
1976	An Austrian expedition led by Gun- ther Schutz came over Bilafond la and attempted Saltoro Kangri II.	<i>HCNL</i> , 32, p. 19
1977	Austrian expedition climbed Ghent NE from Kondus glacier.	<i>HCNL</i> , 32, p. 34
1978	Indian Army expedition led by Col N. Kumar approached from Nubra and climbed Teram Kangri II	<i>HJ</i> , 37, p. 107
1978	Japanese expedition led by H. Koba- yashi climbed Ghent NE from the Kondus glacier.	<i>HCNL</i> , 33, p. 7
1979	Japanese expedition led by S. Hanada came over Bilafond la and made first ascent of Teram Kangri III.	<i>HCNL</i> , 33, p. 23
1979	Japanese expedition led by R. Haya- shibara climbed Sia Kangri from Conway Saddle, descended S face to Siachen glacier and trekked out via Bilafond la.	<i>HCNL</i> 33, p. 24
1980	Indian Army expedition led by Brig K.N. Thandani climbed Apsarasas I.	<i>HJ</i> , 38, p. 124
1980	West German team led by B. Scher- zer climbed Ghent.	<i>HCNL</i> , 34, p. 25
1980	An American team led by Galen	

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
	Rowell traversed the Siachen glacier during their Karakoram Ski Traverse of major glaciers.	
1981	Dutch expedition attempted Saltoro Kangri II from the west.	<i>HCNL</i> , 36, p. 8
1981	Indian Army expedition led by Col Kumar came via Nubra, climbed Saltoro, Kangri II, Sia Kangri I, reached Indira Col, Sia la, Turkestan la and PK 36 glacier pass	<i>HJ</i> , 39, p. 104
1983	Trekking parties crossed over Bala-fond la from the west.	
1984	Indian Army expedition led by Col Prem Chand climbed K12 from Siachen glacier traversing from the west.	<i>HJ</i> , 41, p. 90
1985	Indo-British expedition led by Harish Kapadia, explored and climbed peaks in Terong group. They approached from Siachen, climbed Rimo III and attempted Rimo I	<i>HJ</i> , 42, p. 68
1986	Sia Kangri was climbed by the Indo-American expedition led by Maj K.V. Cherian and Leo Lebon. Seven Indians reached the summit and Americans reached Indira Col.	<i>HJ</i> , 43, p. 80 <i>HCNL</i> , 40, p. 21
1988	Rimo I first ascent by the Indo-Japanese team led by Hukum Singh and Yoshio Ogata. They approached from the Terong valley and Ibex Col.	<i>HJ</i> , 45, p. 104 <i>HCNL</i> , 42, p. 35
1988	Apsarasas I was climbed by the Indian Army Team.	<i>HCNL</i> , 42, p. 35
1989	Rimo II first ascent, and Rimo IV second ascent were climbed by an Indo-British team led by Sonam Palzor and Doug Scott. They approached from the Terong glacier.	<i>HJ</i> , 46, p. 90 <i>HJ</i> , 47, p. 108 <i>HCNL</i> , 43, p. 33
1992	An Indian army team led by Col. M.S. Gill climbed Teram Kangri I.	

History of Rimo Muztagh (1984-1992)

Southern and eastern approaches before and across Saser la.

There were no climbers here before 1984 though there were many travellers.

1984	Rimo IV (7169 m), first ascent by Indian Army Sappers team led by Capt K. S. Sooch. They climbed six other peaks around Central and South Rimo glaciers.	<i>HCNL</i> 38, p. 17
1984	Mamostong Kangri (7516 m), first ascent by the Indo-Japanese team led by Col Balwant Sandhu and Yoshio Ogata. They approached via Mamostong glacier, across Mamostong col (5885 m) to Thangman glacier and climbed the east ridge	<i>HJ</i> 41, p. 93 <i>HCNL</i> 38, p. 17
1986	Rimo I (7583 m) was attempted from the eastern approaches by an Indo-Australian-New Zealand team led by Col Prem Chand and Terry Ryan	<i>HCNL</i> 40, p. 21 See book <i>RIMO</i> (Peter Hillary)
1988	Mamostong Kangri I (7516 m) was climbed by Ladakh Scouts team led by Major A. M. Sethi. They approached the east ridge from the Thangman glacier direct	<i>HJ</i> 46, p. 76 <i>HCNL</i> 42, 55
1989	Mamostong Kangri (7516 m), third ascent by the Indian Army Sappers team led by Major M.P. Yadav (via the route of first ascent).	<i>HJ</i> 46, p. 195 <i>HCNL</i> 43, p. 32
1989	An Indian team led by Harish Kapadia climbed five peaks in the Aq Tash glacier and the Chong Kumdan glacier.	<i>HJ</i> 46, p. 76 <i>HCNL</i> 43, p. 34
1990	Mamostong Kangri (7516 m) climbed by the Border Security Force team led by S C Negi. They also climbed peak 6448 m.	<i>HCNL</i> 45, p. 6
1991	An Indo-German team led by Col I.S. Bhatia climbed unnamed peaks 6010 m and 6335 m near Saser la.	<i>HCNL</i> 45, p. 24
1991	Chong Kumdan I (7071 m), first ascent by the Indo-British team led by Harish Kapadia and Dave Wilkinson. They climbed 9 other peaks and explored Central and North Kumdan glaciers	<i>HJ</i> 48, p. 97 <i>HCNL</i> 45, p. 23
1992	Mamostong Kangri (7516 m) was climbed by an Indian ladies team led by Ms Bachendri Pal	

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4. *Himalaya, Karakoram and East Turkistan 1913-14* by Filippo De Filippi.
5. *A Sketch of the Geography and Geology of Himalaya Mountains and Tibet 1907* by Sir Sidney Burrard.
6. *Himalayan Holiday* by Peter Young.
7. 'First Ascent of Mamostong Kangri (7516 m)' by Col Balwant S. Sandhu, *H.J.*, Vol. 41, p. 93.

28

Lots in a Name

A Study of Names in the Eastern Karakoram

1991

THE EASTERN KARAKORAM, which is the northern part of Ladakh consists of two major valleys, largely uninhabited. On the east the Shyok valley runs from the Karakoram pass to the Khardung ridge in the south. In the west the Nubra valley consists of the Indira col and the Siachen glacier in north to the Khardung ridge again in the south. Except for few villages down in the Nubra valley there are no human dwellings. But still every peak, glacier, camping ground and feature has a name. Who gave them and how did they originate where no humans lived? On the east along the Shyok valley, caravans from Central Asia or Yarkand travelled across the Karakoram pass to cross Saser la to the Nubra valley on their way to Lch. They gave a Yarkandi nomenclature to the route till they reached the Nubra villages. Up towards the Siachen the area was part of the Balti legends. People at the villages in the west had heard of the area, though never visited it in the known past. They went there as porters with explorers and surveyors. Thus the names followed the Balti influence. In Nubra all the names are in Ladakhi, which is based on the Tibetan script. Thus the nomenclature here has created an interesting situation with Ladakhi, Balti and Yarkandi names, borrowed from Muslim and Buddhist scripts and the legends of the area. As a simple example, ice-peak (mountain) would be called differently. To Yarkandis it means *Muztagh*, to Baltis prefix *Sar* signifies that, while Ladakhis know it as *Kangri*. But 'Kangri' is a very genuine Balti name too! So there can be no clear demarcation.

The Land of Gapshan and Burtsa

Much before any maps were drawn, people have travelled. Know-

ledge about the route passed from generation to generation by explaining the place, drawing a 'word map' of the route. This in turn led to the nomenclature of the route, by the description of the travellers and their experiences. This is nowhere more true than on the Central Asia Trade Route between Yarkand and Leh. Yarkandis travelled over this uninhabited area for trade and pilgrimage to Mecca. Their descriptions gave the names (mostly Yarkandi which is of Turki dialect) to the halts and features on the route.

Imagine an old Yarkandi giving directions to a caravan proceeding south to Leh. He would describe how from the barren plains they must climb the 'pass of black gravel', (*Karakoram pass*). Ahead they reach *Polu* ('temporary shelter') at its foot. Not a place to linger around.¹

Cross a river which is 'very quiet' (*Chip Ćhap*) to reach the place where 'Daulat Beg had died' (*Daulat Beg Oldi*, Oldi: died, or Daulat: rich, Beg: great, where a very rich person died). On the east is the *Galwan nala*, named after Rasool Galwan of Ladakh who travelled to Central Asia with many explorers.² The valley bears his name. Going

1. *Polu*: These Polus were constructed out of local mud and barely offered a shelter. This particular site below the Karakoram pass was visited by F. Ludlow in 1928 (*H.J.*, Vol. I, p. 7).

'On the 2nd August, I left the lake and ascended to the Polu en route for the Karakoram pass. Of all the miserable bone-strewn encampments between Panamik and the Karakoram, I found this *Polu* the most unsavoury. My map (52E) informed me that it boasted of "three huts". It did. And when I arrived, I found them all occupied—one by a dead pony, the second by a dead donkey, and the third by a dead Yarkandi. Nor was this all. A few yards from the third hut, a pile of stones and mud had been erected against the face of a cliff to form a shelter from the wind. He looked inside this shelter and found it contained three skulls and other gruesome human remains'.

Recently in 1987, Maj. A.M. Sethi visited this Polu site and found a memorial stone left there by Dr. Ph.C. Visser in 1935. For full details, see *H.J.* Vol. 45, p. 109 and *H.C. Newsletter* 42, p. 42. Both contain photos of this site and the stone.

2. *Rasool Galwan or Gulwan*: He was born in Ladakh in 1878 and went as a porter with many explorers over this route. He was just 12 years of age when he joined Francis Younghusband in 1885 to Lhasa. He was regularly attached to the exploratory journeys of Dr. Philip de Philipe. He travelled with Lord Danmor in 1892 to the Pamirs. During this journey, they went through this unknown valley which bears his name. He had also accompanied Dr. Tom Longstaff, who makes a warm reference to him in his book (p. 185). He died in Ladakh in March 1925 and his grave exists in the old graveyard at Leh. He narrated his experiences in the book *Servant of the Sahibs* (Cambridge University Press, 1923), written with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barrent.

For further details, see *H.C. Newsletter* 45, p. 46

ahead you come across a 'long open space after a slope' (*Depsang plateau*). Before a descent is the 'kitchen run by a Qazi' (*Qazi Langar*). As the route descends down to a nala you will find plenty of burtsa shrubs. It burns faster than the wood and has medicinal properties also. This is the *Burtsa camp*. Now comes the difficult section of the route. 'Gateway of darkness or hell' (*Murgo*, Mur: hell, go: gate). But after passing that you turn east and after a long march camp near the only 'big stone' (*Chhongtash*, Chhong: big, Tash: stone) seen en-route. You cross *Shyok* ('the river of death', Sheo: death), and ahead you camp at a 'temporary camp' at the foot of Saser la (*Saser Brangza*, Brangza: temporary camp).

There is a winter route separating from Daulat Beg Oldi. Turning west one reached the meeting place of Chip Chap and the Rimo river at *Gapshan or Yapshan* ('type of wood or shrub'). Further west rises a huge mountain 'colourful and like a drawing' (*Rimo*: beautiful lines or striped). Going down along the river you reach a lake where the river is blocked by *Chong Kumdan* ('big dam'). A little ahead is a 'smaller dam' (*Kichik Kumdan*). This drains water from a 'long flat glacier which has herbal medicines' or 'the glacier of healing' (see Mamostong legend, *Thangman glacier*). When these dams were breached the flood in the river caused death and destruction. The 'River of death' (*Shyok* -river) originates from here.

Ahead where one sees *Aq Tash* ('white rock') turn west to join the summer route at *Saser Brangza*. The only prominent white rocks (*Aq Tash*) are to be noticed in the land of *Karakoram* ('land of black gravel').

Now comes the 'pass of the golden earth' (*Saser la*, Sa: earth, ser: golden). The 'mountain of golden earth' (*Saser Kangri*, Kangri: ice-peak) rises to the south of it. Ahead on the track there is grass and the 'grazing ground of wild donkeys' (*Skyangpoche*, Skyang: donkey, poche: ground). To the south rises the 'mountain of thousand devils' (*Mamostong Kangri*) based on a Yarkandi legend.³

3. *Mamostong Kangri*: This high mountain has a southern col at 5885 m descending to the Thangman glacier in the east. It joins the winter route at Kichik Kumdan. To avoid the treacherous Saser la the Yarkandi traders tried this deviation. But fog and storm engulfed them. They missed the main glacier exit that leads out to join the Shyok and thus circumvented Saser la. The traders perished. The legend gave the mountain its name of a 'thousand devils' and the flat Thangman became the 'glacier of healing'. (Mamo: Fog, Stong: thousand, Kangri: ice peak and Thang: plain, man: medicine). This pass is now called Mamostong col, 5885 m and was crossed by various expeditions to climb Mamostong Kangri via the Thangman glacier and east ridge of the peak.

Ahead is *Tulum Puti la* ('the long narrow steep pass'). It is here that Ali Hussain has built a good rocky route to help travellers to go over the steep and narrow route.⁴ You come down to the *Nubra valley* (Nubra: western valley) or *Dumra valley* (Dumra: 'valley of flowers and and trees'). You reach the 'new earth' (*Sasoma*, Sa: earth, Soma: new or virgin). This is the first village in the valley, and appropriately Yarkandis see it as the end of the major difficulties. You will also find *Sakang* ('raised ground/house' Sa: ground, Kang, raised, high) and a 'place of cave' (*Phukpoche*, Phuk: cave, Poche: place).⁵ From the 'village at the foot' (*Kalsar*) there are 'two temporary shelters' (*north and south Polus*) and one crosses the *Khardung la* (pass of lower castle; la: pass, Khar: castle, dung: lower or Kharzong: castle). Finally one reaches the 'plain' where caravans meet Leh (Leh: plateau). They are in *Ladakh*, 'land of passes'.

There is a little variation of this route going south along the Shyok. Its first halt is at *Sultan Chushku* ('Sultan resting place', Chushkun: resting place). Ladakhis call it *Chyushku* ('water at corner or small lake') Ahead is *Mandalthang* ('Plain of Mandal', mandal: round wheel, thang: plateau). Finally the route passes *Darbuk* ('flourishing village inside a valley', Dar: flourishing, buk: inside), and *Tankse* ('higher ground') to cross the 'northern pass' (*Chang la*, Chang: north, la: pass), to reach Leh.

Well quite a detailed, if complicated description by one Yarkandi to another! But it explains in their language how all the names of the places originated on this East Karakoram historic trade route. In a broader sense names of the large areas in the surrounding valleys also describe the same. *Chang Chenmo* (Chang Thang) is the 'big northern plains' (Chang: north, Chenmo: big), or *Lingzi Thang* ('Central plains', Lingzi: central; Thang: plains). Lingzi has a more philosophical meaning also, 'centre of the universe or four different worlds'. Hence you find Lingzi Thang plains between Ladakh in the south,

4. *Tulum Puti la*: This 600 m steep rock descends straight down to the Nubra valley. It had a narrow footpath where caravans had difficulties in crossing. The Yarkandis complained to their Sultan who in turn sent an engineer named Ali Hussain. He widened the road and built a 1 m wide footpath with 36-U turns. It is still intact and in regular use.

An army road is now blasted through the rocks and it has reached above this la. Luckily this historic road is not damaged, though it may not be used in future.

5. Longstaff calls it *Popache glen* ('hanging valley') quoting Yarkandi companions (Longstaff, p. 182).

Central Asian plains in the north and Tibetan plateau in the east. *Aksai Chin*, (Aksai: eastern, Chin: China) has of course a simple interpretation.

More broadly entire countries were named. China was *Gyanak* (Gya: area, nak: black, difficult, 'where people wear black clothes'). India was *Gyagar* (gar or kar: white, 'where people wear white clothes'). Here 'white' and 'black' signifies the difficulties of living. Life appeared more grim on the Tibetan plateau or the Chinese Central Asia, while they had always heard of warm and pleasant life in the Indian plains.

We leave the Yarkandis here and their 'name game'. They must go back soon over the high passes. If caught at Leh for the winter they can return only the next year, for it is '... impossible to cross the pass till the "apricots are ripe"' (Longstaff, p. 165).

Note

Most of these names mentioned in the article were identified by different scholars, Yarkandi traders at Leh and lamas. Most of the names were found to be distinctly Yarkandi. It is of course difficult to correctly interpret the meaning of the names which are more phonetic and have various meanings. However, the above interpretation is correctly suited to the trail, which many have now travelled. These are Muslim and Central Asian names. A common Ladakhi did not recognise many of these names or could not tell the meaning. But as one consulted them about the names in the Nubra valley and to the south of it, Ladakhi scholars or even an educated muleteer could identify the meaning. Once down in Ladakh even lama scholars far away at Darjeeling also gave the same interpretation of the names as a Ladakhi, signifying that they were based on the Tibetan script and the Buddhist culture.

The names for the peaks suggested recently are given at the end with their meanings.

Where Rose is Sia

Going up the Nubra river one enters, what F. Bullock Workman called 'the ice-wild of Eastern Karakoram'. This is the Siachen glacier with high peaks, glaciers and the valleys of both the sides. This is the ice-wilderness whose exact location, boundaries and connections were established after many explorations and surveys. Locals never travelled here for there were no passes to trade across. But they had heard

of these areas and had heard the legends about it handed down to them through generations.

How does the nomenclature in such an area get established? First it was through the legends as narrated by the locals to the first explorers. And the rest were given by the explorers themselves, or after consulting the local pundits.

As we returned from the Terong valley in 1985, at a sharp turn Dave Wilkinson barred my way. 'What is ahead? The most prominent feature of this glacier?' After a thought and fumbings I replied, 'A rose', 'Wrong, its a Sia'. Unbelievable as it may sound this glacier has many rose plants on the moraine rocks, edges and walls surrounding it. And as in Balti 'rose' is 'sia' the glacier gets its name. Dr. A. Neve appears to have heard of it spoken of by the Nubra people as the Siachen and Dr. Longstaff gave it this name on his sketch-map. F. Bullock Workman gives a detailed explanation.

Upon much inquiry, I learned that the meaning of Siachen is, literally, rose-bush, Sia is the Balti name for jungle rose and *Chen* means a collection of thorns. Such wild rose-bushes are legion in the nalas and flourish in pink splendour to the tongues of the glaciers in Baltistan and Nubra. From Dr. Thomas, the Tibetan scholar, I learn that the Tibetan Se-Ba-Can means 'having rose-bushes'. So, probably, the Balti meaning is derived from the Tibetan. As is well known, Baltistan was subject to Tibet in the eighth century.⁶

We were in the Terong valley, the first eastern tributary of the Siachen glacier as one goes up from its snout. Though it contained three large glacier systems, it was unknown to the people of Nubra. They called it simply *Terong* ('that valley', Te: that, rong: valley). Scholars interpret it as (g)ter: hidden, rong: gorge ('hidden gorge'). *Shelkar Chorten* glacier in the valley goes southeastwards between the two Terong glaciers. Possibly this glacier takes its name from, *Shelma*: crystal and *Chorten*: Buddhist symbol, stupa, 'glacier of crystal chorten'. These glaciers were explored by Dr. Ph.C. Visser's expedition in 1929-30. Surveyor Khan Sahib Afraz Gul with them possibly decided on these names.

6. *Two Summers in the ice-Wilds of Eastern Karakoram* by Fanny Bullock Workman and William Hunter Workman, pp. 155-56.

A lake on the North Terong glacier, is the 'lake of bones'. This was so called after a legend that people had died here and the bones were discovered in this lake with poisonous water.

Rimo (striped) group rises in the northern part of the Terong valley and also overlooks the eastern glacier systems called 'Rimo glaciers'. Dr. Ph.C. Visser had explored these glaciers during his visits from the east. Thus he linked up both his surveys and exploration.

All other names in this valley are of recent origin and are explained at the end.

For the peaks ahead on the Siachen glacier and the Karakoram in general Survey of India had a policy.

The numerous peaks which have no native names have been numbered in a scientific way after the astronomical system. The mapping of India has recently been placed upon a new basis as more peaks of the Himalaya and Tibet are becoming known and it has been thought advisable now to name all peaks according to the map in which they fall.

—Colonel Sir Sidney Burrend

Thus all the peaks had numbers. Some remain till today like K2 and, on Siachen, K12 and K36 glaciers.

The Workmans' expeditions, 1911-12, with surveyor Grant Peterkin, named many peaks without the Survey numbers as 'King George Peak', and 'Mt. Hardinge' (after the Victory of India). They called the entire group the 'King George V group', and claimed that this was done with the permission of the Queen and the Viceroy. But the Survey of India to their credit, even in the times of British colonial India, did not accept these. Though, the rejection of these names was done with some diplomatic charm.

We suggested the name Sia group, partly because of the name Siachen and partly because of the connexion of the rose with British royalty, thus giving some recognition to the wishes of the explorer.

—H.J., Vol. X, p. 101

These peaks were called after their natural names like Sia Kangri, Sherpi Kangri and Saltoro Kangri, and the group as the Siachen Muztagh.

The other names that the Workmans gave to the smaller peaks

were based on local legends, and the shapes of mountains or their locations. Thus we have Hawk peak, Junction peak (at Teram Shehr—Siachen junction) and Tawiz peak.

Tawiz: Workmans found that the porters were unwilling to accompany them to the Siachen glacier due to the hardships involved.

After our arrival, I noticed the odd tawiz, or magic amulets, hanging by bits of cord from the coolies' necks. They were said to contain petitions to the gods to bring storms or other calamities, that might limit our stay in the snows, and force us to return and leave the Saltoro valley.

Tawiz here were worn for ill-omen, unlike for the good or cure in the present days.

Towards the centre of the Siachen glacier at the junction with the Teram Shehr glacier there is a plateau. The naming of this saw bitter exchange of written words between Workmans and Dr. Longstaff, the other explorer responsible for the nomenclature of this area.

The now deserted Ghyari nala was in ancient times densely inhabited to the tongue of the Bilaphond glacier. The Baltis of that time were supposed to have crossed the Bilaphond la and met the Yarkandis of Tarim Shehr with whom they played polo. Polo always plays a great role in Balti saga. The learned men did not say how the people of Turkistan came to be in this distant ice-region, only reported that a large city was said to stand on this present site to Tarim Shehr. The Baltis feared the Yarkandis, who are said to have often crossed to the Ghyari nala to 'loot' cattle and property and abduct women from the villages. An important mullah, Hazrat Ameer gave the engaged Baltis the tawiz magic amulet, and told them to put it at once on the summit of Bilaphond pass, and ordered them after doing so not to return home the same way, but to go around via Yarkand.

The Baltis, having placed the *tawiz* on the pass, disobeyed the priest's orders and returned to their villages the same way from the pass. Soon afterwards a great storm visited Tarim Shehr, and the

snow from the mountains slipped and fell upon the city, destroying it. The Balti priests say the calamity would have been even greater had the avenger of the woman gone around by Yarkand home, and that today not even grass and burtsa would be found to mitigate the rocky desolation of Tarim Shehr.

Workmans called it *Tarim Shehr* (oasis city, Tarim: oasis, Shehr: city) as it was before the storm. Dr. Longstaff called it *Teram Shehr* ('destroyed city', Teram: destroyed). This led to war of words. Today it is known as Teram Shehr and the peaks nearby as Teram Kangris. Dr. Longstaff seems to have won the battle.

The name *Teram Kangri* was given in Dehradun by Dr. Longstaff with the approval of Sir Sidney Burard, Surveyor General, from the only locality place name, *Teram*, in the region. The alteration of spelling to *Tarim* by the Workmans for the glacier tributary of the Siachen is incorrect.

—*H.J.*, Vol. X, p. 102

The Italians who visited the glacier in 1930 under Giotto Dainelli also narrate a tale of raiders from Yarkand to this city and of its destruction.

They named the col leading in the east to the Rimo glaciers as 'Col Italia' or *Passo Italia* after the mountaineers and scientists from Italy who had worked in the Eastern Karakoram.

At the head of the Siachen glacier, there are two passes. One to the east is *Turkestan la* (as it leads to Turkestan). Francis Younghusband had reached this pass from the north while trying to locate the Siachen glacier. He thought that he was on *Saltoro pass* (present Bilaphond la). Dr. Longstaff called this pass 'Younghusband's Saddle' but the present name was established by Workmans. They also named the northern col as *Indira Col*.

Indira Col: This is the northernmost pass on the Siachen. There was a confusion in the recent days that this pass is named after India's late Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi. In fact both the pass and Mrs Gandhi were named after goddess Laxmi. (Indira: one of the names of Laxmi, goddess of wealth).

North and northeast of Siachen glacier are four glaciers, each draining to the Shaksgam river in the north. These glaciers were visited by Francis Younghusband in 1889 and Dr. U. Balestereri of the

Duke of Spoleto Italian expedition in 1929. They named these glaciers. The groups and peaks above are also known after the names of these glaciers.

Urdok is the first glacier going down from the Indira Col. Younghusband named it after a duck he saw on the glacier. (*Urdok* in Turki means duck). (*Wonders of the Himalaya*, p. 149). But scholars give a different interpretation too (Ur: high, dok: solid, or tok: top, thus 'high solid glacier').⁷ Possibly Younghusband named it after *Urdokas* ('high solid place or place of ducks') from where he had come. The next glacier by which Younghusband reached Turkestan la was called *Staghar glacier* ('many coloured') after colours of its moraine by the Spoleto team later.

Singhi ('difficult') glacier (or more correctly *Singye*) is next with *Singhi Kangri* ('difficult ice-peak') overlooking the Siachen glacier. *Kyagar* ('whitish') is the last glacier to the east. Both these were named by the Duke of Spoleto's team. They also named *Kharpo Gang* ('white glacier'). The range rising between the Teram Shehr and the northern Kyagar glacier was named *Apsarasas* ('place of fairies', Apsara: fairy, sas: place) by Grant Peterkin of the Workman expedition having surveyed the group from the Siachen glacier.

On the western rim of the Siachen glacier after the obvious *Sia Kangri* and *Sia la* ('ice-peak and pass of rose'), from a plateau rises peak *Ghent*. This double summited peak was so named by the Workmans, . . . which at the suggestion of Mr. W.P. Cresson, F.R.G.S. I have named after the Treaty of Ghent, which terminated hostilities between Great Britain and the United States in 1814'. Somehow this name has remained.

After *The Hawk*, *Peak 36 glacier* drains from two of the highest peaks of the area, *Saltoro Kangris* (Saltoro: giver of light). This name is given after the Saltoro region in the west Karakoram which they overlook. There is *Sherpi Kangri* ('ice-peak of Sherpi') with the *Sherpi Gang glacier* ('snow glacier of Sherpi'). Little to the south of it is the Lolophond glacier. Is it named after Dr. Longstaff who had firmly established the extent of the length of the Siachen glacier by visiting it from different directions. Dr. Longstaff wrote in the *Geographical Journal*, (February 1912, p. 145) that the coolies named it 'Loloff'. But perhaps he meant the pass, not the glacier.

Dr. Longstaff was inclined to naming the features and species

7. Baltis pronounce an oasis as 'rdokas' (rdo: rock, kas: split; 'split rock').

after himself. 'However, I had already collected a very pale coloured weasel, a new species, which was handed down to posterity as *Mustela longstaffi*'

—Longstaff, p. 169

About the glacier he writes

Apparently they (coolies) did me the honour of christening this glacier after me. The Workmans were the next visitors and put the name Lolophond glacier on their map. Loloff was the nearest the Baltis could get to my name.

So Longstaff credits the Workmans to have honoured him with this name officially. How these explorers, so critical of each other's exploits, still scratch each other's backs!

However, this name, Lolophond rhymes with Bilaphond which is the name of the glacier and the pass to its west. Bilaphond is 'bright coloured butterfly' in Balti and suits the terrain well.

Bilaphond Glacier and La

When in 1911 the Workmans inquired through their Parsec agent, Byramjee, what porters call this glacier one and all said, 'Bilapho' and spelled it without 'nd'. They said that the word was a Balti one, meaning a small bright coloured butterfly. Upon further inquiries they discovered that the reason for this name was not because many butterflies were seen on it, but that, in former days, this name was given on account of the shape which the glacier assumes as Naram. This definition presupposes an intelligent and poetic fancy not present in the Balti people today. Perhaps in the past someone standing on an eminence above Naram (*Naram*: soft, soft rocks) on a clear day, bearing in mind the pretty ideas can easily make the main glacier and its affluents picture to his mind's eye a monster ice-butterfly' (from the Workmans, p. 131).

However, Dr. Longstaff prefers more ordinary explanation. 'The glacier, which had been called the Saltoro glacier by the Khans of Khapalu is locally known as Bilaphond (nasal, *d* mute), which we understood to mean "butterfly". Swarms of migrating butterflies killed by storm, are often seen on glaciers and this suggest a possible origin for the name'. Dr. Longstaff originally called the pass as the 'Saltoro Pass'. Now it is called Bilaphond la.

Further down is the *Gyong* (tough, difficult) la (la: pass) (Or *rGyong*) which links across with the *Chumik* ('spring') glacier in the west. As we near the Siachen glacier snout, and the civilization again, we have two glaciers with names descriptive of the difficulties on the passes above them. *Langongma*. 'above the pass', la: pass, gongma: above) and *Layogma* ('pass of wind or snow-storm', la: pass, yogma: windy, storm). These glaciers were surveyed by the Visser expedition in 1929-30 (see *G.J.*, October 1934).

As the Nubra river emerges from the Siachen glacier snout, it is called (still on the maps) *Yarma Tsangpo*. Literally *Yarma* means 'superior' but scholars think it was originally called *lema* meaning 'wonderful'. A small but wonderful gompa of the same name in the Nubra valley (opposite Warshi) is supposed to be as old as the Potala of Tibet. South in the Nubra valley is *Charasa* village and the gompa.

Charasa used to be the capital of the ancient principality of Nubra. The people are of mixed blood and not pure Ladakhis, though, like them, predominantly Buddhist. It was captured after hard fighting by Muhammad Haider in 1532 'and the vapour from the brains of the infidels of that country ascended to the heavens'.

—Longstaff, p. 181

The place is situated a little above the junction of the Nubra and Shyok rivers and is approachable from four sides. Thus its name is apt. Char: four, sa: place, 'the place (visited) from four directions.'

The only name which is an 'outsider' in the lower Nubra-Shyok valley is *Partapur* village. Zorawar Singh of Jammu had captured the valley in 1829. He gave this name in the honour of his Dogra king Maharaj Pratap Singh. Now Partapur is an important point in the valley with an airport. It is in the Shyok valley after its junction with the Nubra river. This valley received the full blast of the Shyok floods and there are songs in the Nubra valley about the destructive powers of *Shyok* ('river of death', sheo: death).

The present day hostilities on the Siachen glacier between the Indian and Pakistani armies have been responsible for new nomenclature and legends. The Indian Hindu soldiers have erected a temple of the *Siachen glacier mata* ('Goddess of the Siachen glacier') who is worshipped with Hindu rites. A legendary fight on the shoulder of K12 has been given the place the name *Bana Post* (after the fighter

Sub. Bana Singh) and we have *Kumar Post*. Many glaciers are simply known as numbers like G1, G2 and others. All these are of course best avoided at present, but who knows sometime in future they may be permanent features, like others. That's how legends grow.

The barrenness, difficulties and the remoteness of the glacier is total. Still the nomenclature of this area has been established by various means by the travellers. As long as people travel or know of the area, there will be names. In fact sometimes these names and legends attract one to the area and to face the difficulties. As the Balti philosophical saying goes about life:

Whatever the hardships,
 Whatever the names, let me
 O'Allah, return thither again.

Peak Names of Recent Origins

1985: Proposed by The Siachen Indo-British Expedition in the Terong valley (see *H.J.*, Vol. 42, p. 68 for their locations).

Sundbrar — A beautiful place.

Sondhi — A sudden beautiful appearance. There is a place by the name of Sundbrar in Baltistan. Kashmiri Brahmins and Hindus along with several thousand people used to gather at this place on a certain day in June. They would worship the Hindu Goddess Laxmi and wait for the rising of water, praying for it to appear. At an appointed time a stream would fill the basin and the multitude would shout 'Sondhi'.

Above all, this phenomenon portrays the prevalence of the Hindu rituals deep inside the Muslim Baltistan (*See Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladak*, 1890, p. 801).

Lharimo — Holy painted mountain. Lha: holy

Doab — Meeting place of two waters. Do: holy

Safina — Boat. In Balti philosophy this is a special boat which carries one to heaven.

Saigat — Leopard's leap. This peak, particularly tilts (leaps) towards the giant Rimo peaks.

- Chorten** — The Buddhist symbol.
- Ngabong Terong** — Ngabong: bactrian camel—the famous double-humped camel of Yarkand. A few are still seen in the Nubra valley.
- Siab Chushku** — Siab: meeting place of three waters (North and South Terong and Shelkar Chorten glaciers). Chushku: resting place.
- Doab Chushku** — Camp at meeting place of two waters. (Two branches of North Terong glacier).

1989: Proposed by the Chong Kumdan expedition in the Aq Tash and Chong Kumdan valleys (see *H.J.*, Vol. 46, p. 76 for their locations).

- Lokhzung** — Eagle's nest.
- Chathung Thung** — Black-necked cranes.
- Chogam** — A box to keep holy scriptures.
- Stos** — Goat which gives Pashmina wool.
- Skyang** — Wild horse.

1991: Proposed by the Chong Kumdan Indo-British expedition in the Chong Kumdan valley (see *H.J.*, Vol. 48 for their locations).

- Laknis** — Vulture of two (glaciers). Lak: Vulture, nis: two (peak rising between the Central and North Kumdan glaciers)
- Landay** — Ghostly or Scare of ghost (a scary peak).

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Appendix I

Summary of Expedition Climbs

A. TWO IS COMPANY

The expedition of the Mana gad valley (east of Jadh ganga) turning south of Tridhara. This valley has not been entered or recorded since the visit of J.B. Auden (1939). This is one of the easternmost valleys, draining Mana bamak, Sri Kailash bamak, and Trimukhi bamak.

The following peaks were climbed (both first ascents):

.	<i>Peak/height</i>	<i>Summiters</i>	<i>Date</i>
1.	Trimukhi Parbat East (6280 m)	Monesh Devjani Pasang Bodh	30 May 1990
2.	'Nandi' (5795 m) (NE of Trimukhi Parbat)	Harish Kapadia Monesh Devjani Pasang Bodh Yograj Buruwa	28 May 1990
	<i>Col Reached:</i> 'Saraswati Col' (5900 m)	Harish Kapadia Monesh Devjani Pasang Bodh Yograj Buruwa	4 June 1990

This high col at the head of the southeast branch of Mana bamak, is situated on the Mana dhar. It descends gently to the Saraswati valley a little south of the Mana pass and would lead to Badrinath. J.B. Auden had mentioned the possibility of its existence while observing it from a high col between the two branches of Mana bamak. It is for the first time that this col over a high mountain divide was explored and reached by this party.

Other cols observed and recorded

'Arwa Col' (6100 m): Between Mana (southeast) glacier and Arwa glacier.

'Tara Col' (6000 m): Between the western and the eastern valleys of the Tara Bamak near the Mana pass.

'Mana Col' (6100 m): Reached by J.B. Auden in 1939, between the southeast and the southwest branches of the Mana Bamaks.

Period: 4 May 1990 to 14 June 1990.

Members: Harish Kapadia and Monesh Devjani.

B. IN FAMOUS FOOTSTEPS

The expedition followed the four famous treks in Central Garhwal and Kumaon. In 45 days, 315 kms of high altitude ground was covered with attempts on 3 peaks. It reached 3 high passes and explored one unknown pass, covering 4 river valleys.

Peaks

1. Kagbhusand (5830 m) attempted till 5300 m by Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 19 June.

2. Chalab (6160 m) attempted till 5700 m by Harish, Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 3 July.

3. 'Girithi Top' (c. 6120 m) attempted till 5960 m by Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 4 July.

Passes

1. Gupt Khal (5790 m) reached by Harish, Allwyn and Har Sing on 17 June.

2. Bhyundar Khal (5090 m) reached by Milind and Sher Sing on 17 June.

3. Unta Dhura (5360 m) crossed by Harish, Arun and Muslim with 4 porters on 8 July.

4. 'Danu Dhura' (5560 m) (An alternate to Traill's Pass) reached up to 5340 m by Harish, Arun and Muslim on 17 July.

The expedition operated along the two major river valleys of Dhauli ganga and Gori ganga. Four of its large tributaries were followed from the mouth to the source; namely Amrit ganga, Girithi ganga, Goenkha gad and Shalang gad.

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant and Muslim Contractor. (Allwyn Carvalho, Milind Pansare and Dr. Vasant Desai joined in the first part).

Dates: From 4 June to 31 July 1988.

C. SUDARSHAN PARBAT—UNE BELLE MONTAGNE

1. *Sudarshan Parbat* (6507 m)

First ascent, 30 May 1981 by the east ridge. About 1500 ft of rope fixed and some very exposed and difficult sections of ice. Starting from the final camp at 0400 hrs, the summit was reached at 1000 hrs.

Summiters: Hubert Odier, Alain de Blanchaud, Zerkis Boga, Lakhpa Tsering, Bernard Odier and Jacques Giraud.

2. *Chaturbhuj* (6655m)

First ascent, 5 June 1981. Starting from camp on Swetvarn Bamak (e) to a col in north. Descent of 60 m over ice to the north and a long snow traverse to the north ridge. Then followed the ridge to the summit. This peak was never attempted before.

Summiters: Hubert Odier, Alain de Blanchaud and Jacques Giraud.

3. *Saife* (6161 m)

Second ascent. Three climbs, all by the northeast face to the east ridge and summit.

19 May 1981 by Hubert Odier (solo) skied down partly and survived a giant avalanche.

30 May 1981 by C.D. Danthi, Kanu Pomal and Kami Tsering.

7 June 1981 by Alain de Blanchaud and Jacques Giraud.

4. *Koteshwar I* (c. 6080 m)

Climbed, 19 May 1981, by the east ridge.

Summiters: Alain de Blanchaud and Jacques Giraud.

5. *Koteshwar II* (5690 m)

Climbed, 24 May 1981, by the northwest ridge.

Summiters: Harish Kapadia, Vijay Kothari, Kami Tsering and Nawang.

6. *Swetvarn* (6340 m)

C.D. Danthi, Jacques Giraud, Kanu Pomal and Lakhpa Tsering

reached within 300 ft of the summit from the east ridge on 25 May 1981. A narrow traverse and mixed terrain ahead stopped them.

7. *Yogeshwar* (6678 m)

Harish Kapadia, Lakhpa and Kami Tsering reached within 1000 ft of the summit on 6 June 1981. After crossing a high col to the adjoining 'Shyamvarn Bamak' attempt was made by the south ridge. A huge bergschrund cut off the ridge from the summit pyramid.

Area: Gangotri glacier region in the Garhwal Himalaya. Swetvarn Bamak is a tributary glacier of Raktavarn Bamak.

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader and liaison officer), Zerksis Boga, C.D. Danthi, Vijay Kothari, Kanu Pomal, Dr. V.N. Desai and Dr. R.H. Shroff (Indians), Bernard Odier (deputy leader), Hubert Odier, Alain de Blanchaud and Jacques Giraud (French).

D. YOUTH IN GIBSON'S GARHWAL

The expedition was organised with a view to train young members between the ages 16 to 21 and to expose them to high altitude climbing experience. The expedition was successful in climbing the following peaks:

1. Bandarpunch West (White Peak) (6102 m) 10 June—First ascent
Summiters: Arun Samant, Dhiren Toolsidas and Harish Kapadia.

2. Kalanag (Black Peak) (6387 m)

(a) 29 May—Climbed

Summiters: Kartik Bhagat, Dhiren Toolsidas and Harish Kapadia.

(b) 31 May—Climbed

Summiters: Arun Samant, Ravi Mariwala and Sher Singh.

3. 'Barasukha' (c. 5530 m)

(South of Dhumdhar Kandi pass)

1 June—Climbed

Summiters: Genevieve deSa and Dhiren Toolsidas.

4. 'Chhotanag' (5220 m)

1 June—Climbed

Summiters: Milind Pansare and Pratap Singh

5. 'Ruinsara' (c. 5480 m)

24 May—Climbed

Summiters: Arun Samant, Kartik Bhagat, Ravi Mariwala and Pratap Singh.

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, Jagdish Nanavati, Dr. Vasant Desai.

Dhiren Toolsidas (leader-youth), Genevieve deSa, Parul Sheth, Hina Patel, Kartik Bhagat, Ravi and Shyam Mariwala and Milind Pansare.

Also accompanied: Mrs. Geeta Kapadia, Mrs. Sheela Jaywant, Mrs. Manda Nanavati, Sonam, Nawang and Prashant.

Period: 8 May to 27 June 1984.

Solar Energy Experiment

During the expedition we carried 'Solar-Bottle' and a 'Snow-Tank' to experiment on their usage by utilizing solar energy. A 1.25 litre black aluminium bottle (100 mm diameter—cost Rs. 20) and a twenty-litre black aluminium tank (170 mm diameter—cost Rs. 150) were taken. The solar bottle strapped to the top of the rucksack was carried to the summits and was able to supply warm drinking water at summit camps, during long snow-plods and summit climbs. On a good sunny day it produced about 600 cc of warm water within 2 hours, whereas the snow tank gave about ten litres of warm water from snow within 3 hours at lower camps. At the base camp, sealed in a large polythene bag, the snow tank even gave us warm water for the most needed self-cleansing operations. Though, weighing only about 3.5 kg this snow tank was unwieldy to carry due to its one metre length. A snow tank, half this size would be more ideal. It was observed that even during a cloudy day in the absence of direct solar radiation, diffused radiation and snow-reflected radiation were sufficient to do the needful. Only during snowfalls or when the air temperature was very low, no snow could be melted. Further details are available on request.

E. MOUNTAIN OF LONG LIFE

The expedition climbed the following peaks:

1. *Chiring We* (6559 m): First ascent. Climbed on 10 June by Zerkis S. Boga, Lakhpa Tsering, Nayankumar Katira and Kami Tsering. Route: From Camp 3 to the col between Chiring We and Bamba Dhura. Then on the north face to the west ridge, which was followed to the top. This was the highest unclimbed peak in Kumaon. About 1500 ft of rope was fixed on the final assault and the angle of climb was about 60° steep.

2. *Bamba Dhura* (6334 m): Second ascent. Climbed on 5 June by Zerksis S. Boga and Chewang Tashi.

Route: From Camp 3 to the col between Bamba Dhura and Chiring We. Then followed the southeast ridge to the top. Some portion about 50° steep.

3. *Kalabaland Dhura* (6105 m): First ascent. Climbed on 6 June by Harish Kapadia, Vijay Kothari and Lakhpa Tsering.

Route: From Camp 3 to a col on north of the peak. Followed a steep gully to the top. Heavy cornices on the top, situated on the Kalabaland-Milam watershed. This is a suggested name for this unnamed peak.

4. *Unnamed Peak* (5928 m): Third ascent. Climbed on 9 June by Kali R. Bordiwala and Rajendra A. Desai.

Route: From Camp 2 traversed to its eastern approaches and easy climb to this dome-shaped peak, situated on the watershed, south of the above peak.

F. SPITI—WHERE TWO WORLDS MEET

Peaks climbed by members with date (1983)

1. Lagma (5761 m) by Harish, Shekhar, Pratap, Muslim, Bhupesh, Arun on 5 August.
2. Sibbu (5700 m)* by K. Kutty, M. Bhagwat on 20 June.
3. Zumto (c. 5800 m) by Harish, Bhupesh, Gaurang on 18 August.
4. Tserip (c. 5980 m)* by Harish, Bhupesh on 18 August.
5. Kawu (c. 5910 m)* by Harish, Bhupesh on 18 August.

Peaks Attempted: Tangmor (5900 m)*, Chau Chau Kang Nilda (6303 m), Shijbang (c. 5250 m)*

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Zerksis Boga (deputy leader), Arun Samant, Muslim Contractor, Bhupesh Ashar, Flt Lt Shekhar Jaywant and Gaurang Bhatia. (Advance party: K. Kutty and M. Bhagwat).

Period: 20 July to 31 August 1983.

*Heights by altimeter. Names suggested by us to the Survey of India

G. A RETURN TO LINGTI

The expedition approached from Sisbang gorge and returned via Syarma nala and Shilla jot, covering 210 km. About 15 rivers and nalas and 11 high passes were crossed in 45 days.

Peaks Climbed: 1. 'Lama Kyent' (6040 m), 2. Parilungbi (6166 m), 3. 'Labrang' (5900 m), 4. 'Runse' (6175 m), 5. 'Geling' (c. 6100 m), 6. 'Gyadung' (6160 m). All except Parilungbi are first ascents.

Peaks Attempted: 1. 'Lhakhang' (6250 m), 2. Shilla (6132 m), 3. 'Gyagar' (c. 6400 m).

Period: 6 June to 9 August 1987.

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Muslim Contractor and Dhiren Toolsidas. Ravi Mariwala accompanied the team during approach.

H. EXPLORING 'THAT VALLEY'—TERONG

Peaks climbed (all first ascents)

1.	Rimo III (7233 m)	Wilkinson and Fotheringham	14 July NE ridge From east via South Rimo glacier
2.	'Sondhi' (6480 m)	Samant and Dhiren	13 July west ridge via western icefall
3.	'Sundbrar' (6300 m)	Samant and Dhiren	12 July west ridge via western icefall
4.	'Lharimo' (6070 m)	Boga and Agarwal	12 July south ridge
5.	'Doab' (6045 m)	Contractor and Harsinh	15 July South ridge
6.	'Safina' (5975 m)	Samant and Contractor	6 July west ridge
7.	'Chorten' (6050 m)	Venables Solo	22 July west ridge
8.	'Ngabong Terong' (6180 m)	Venables Solo	24 July east ridge

The following peaks were attempted

(a) Rimo I (7385 m)	Saunders and Venables	reached 6900 m via SW ridge
(b) 'Saigat' (6130 m)	Kapadia and Pratapsinh	reached 5800 m on south face

The expedition explored five different cols.

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, M.H. Contractor, Dhiren Toolsidas, Z.S. Boga and Dr. (Mrs) M. Agarwal (Indian). Dave Wilkinson, Jim Fotheringham, Tony Saunders, Stephen Venables and Henry Osmaston (British), 2nd Lt Mahendra (Army liaison officer).

Period: 31 May to 4 August 1985.

I. EAST OF SASER LA

Peaks Climbed (All first ascents)*In Aq Tash Glacier: 1989*

1. 'Lokhzung' (6090 m)	12 August	Muslim Contractor Pasang Bodh
2. 'Chathung Thung' (5645 m)	14 August	Muslim Contractor Pasang Bodh

In Chong Kumdan Glacier

3. 'Chogam' (6250 m)	14 August	Arun Samant Monesh Devjani Koylu Ram
4. 'Stos' (6005 m)	15 August	Arun Samant Koylu Ram
5. 'Skyang' (5770 m)	16 August	Monesh Devjani Yog Raj (Buruwa)

Other Activities

(a) While attempting peak 6739 m in the Aq Tash glacier, a high point 'Khara Tower', c. 6400 m, was reached by Arun Samant and Pasang Bodh on 7 August.

(b) Two unexplored glaciers, Aq Tash and Chong Kumdan, were

visited and photographed. These were perhaps the last unexplored regions east and north of Saser la.

(c) Remains of the historic glacier dam at the meeting point of Chong Kumdan glacier moraine and Shyok river were observed, studied and photographed.

Area: East Karakoram, Lch-Sasoma-across Saser la (5395 m) to the east—to Saser Brangza. To north along the Shyok river to Aq Tash and Chong Kumdan glaciers.

Team: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, Muslim Contractor and Monesh Devjani.

Period: From 1 July 1989 to 29 August 1989.

J. CHONG KUMDAN

(A) *First Ascents* (7)

	<i>Date the summit was reached/ attempted</i>	<i>No. of persons who reached the summit</i>
1. Chong Kumdan I (7071 m)	4 August 14 August	Wilkinson, Porter, Church, McAdie Attempted, Griffin, Nunn (reached 6640 m) Wilkinson, Church
2. Chong Kumdan IV (c. 6520 m)	26 July	
3. Chong Kumdan V (c. 6520 m)	22 July	All 6 British with Ashar, Tambe
4. Kichik Kumdan (c. 6640 m)	30 July 4 August	Nunn, Griffin (traversed the peak) Attempted, Ashar, Pasang, Tikam (reached 6600 m)
5. 'Laknis' (6235 m)	12 August	Wilkinson, Church, McAdie, Ashar, Kapadia, Contractor, Tambe, Pasang
6. 'Kumdan Terong' (6456 m)	15 August	Contractor, Ashar, Pasang
7. 'Landay' (6170 m)	16 August	Church, McAdie

(B) *Second Ascents* (3)

1. Chogam (6250 m)	4 August	Kothari, Pania, Prakash Yog Raj
	7 August	Pande, Tambe
	7 August	Solo (Ashar)
	15 August	Wilkinson, Kapadia, Tikam, Tikam Jr
2. Stos (6005 m)	16 August	Solo (Griffin)
	7 August	Solo (Ashar)
	16 August	Solo (Griffin)
3. Skyang (5770 m)	16 August	Wilkinson, Griffin, Nunn, Kapadia, Prakash, Tikam
	7 August	Attempted Kothari, Pania (reached 5700 m)

(C) *Attempts* (1)

1 Chong Kumdan III (6670 m)	3 August	Attempted, Contractor, Pasang, Tikam (reached 6600 m)
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(D) *New Cols Reached* (2)

1 Chang col (c. 6500 m)	2 August	Kapadia, Contractor, Pasang, Tikam
2 Chong Ibex col (c. 6000 m)	14 August	Contractor, Ashar, Pasang

The expedition generally explored the Chong Kumdan glacier and its subsidiary Chogam glaciers. Central Kumdan glacier was traversed fully and North Kumdan glacier observed. The old glacier dam on the Shyok was also observed.

In all 15 different ascents were made with 49 man-ascents on different peaks.

Period: 29 June-3 September 1991.

Members: Harish Kapadia (Leader), M.H. Contractor, Bhupesh Ashar, Vijay Kothari, Dhiren Pania and Ajay Tambe. Dave Wilkinson (British Leader), Paul Nunn, Lindsay Griffin, John Porter, Neil McAdie and Dr. William Church. *Liaison Officer:* Capt Arun Pandey.

Appendix II

Chronology of Himalayan Trips (1963-1993)

A. Mountaineering

Training

- | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|
| 1. October 1964 | Basic Training Course at Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling. | Reached up to 5490 m. |
| 2. June 1967 | Advance Training Centre at Nehru Institute of Mountaineering at Uttarkashi. | Attempted peak Bhagirathi II (6512 m). Failed by 30 m. |

Expeditions

Climbed by author Expedition climbs

- | | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| 1. June 1968 | University of Bombay Milam Glacier Expedition to Kumaon. | Climbed Ikualari (6059 m) (second ascent) |
| 2. June 1969 | Sunderdhunga-Tharkot Expedition to Garhwal.
<i>Article 5, p. 80</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. XIX, p. 123</i> | Attempted Tharkot (6099 m) reaching up to 6000 m when an avalanche swept the party. All rescued. |
| 3. June 1970 | The Bethartoli Himal Expedition in Nanda Devi Sanctuary (deputy leader).
<i>Article 4</i> | Climbed Bethartoli Himal South (6318 m) (second ascent)
Four died in avalanche on Main peak. |

330 *Appendices*

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|-----------------|--|--|
| 4. June 1973 | Manali Expedition. | Climbed Shiti Dhar, (5290 m). |
| 5. June 1974 | The Nanda Devi Sanctuary Expedition.
<i>Article 7, p. 102</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. XXXIII, p. 104</i> | Climbed Devtoli (6788 m). (first ascent) Accident at 6400 m. Rescued and carried for 8 days to BC and rescued by helicopter. |
| 6. May 1976 | North Sikkim Trek.
<i>Article 13, p. 156</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. XXXV, p. 181</i> | Climbing around Green lake, Zemu glacier, Crossed Tangchung la, Thieu la, Lugnak la and Sebu la, all above 4900 m, 250 km trek |
| 7. June 1977 | The Chiring We Expedition to Kumaon. | Three members of expedition climbed pp. 5600. |
| 8. May 1978 | The Sherpa Trail trek across East Nepal from Kathmandu to Darjeeling.
<i>Article 12, p. 151</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 36, p. 29</i> | Across 9 passes in 350 km trek. |
| 9. June 1979 | The Kalabaland Expedition in Kumaon
<i>Article 10, p. 132</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 36, p. 68</i> | Climbed 'Kalabaland Dhura' 6105 m. (first ascent). Expedition also climbed Chiring We, Bamba Dhura and 'Sankalpa'. |
| 10. August 1980 | Ladakh and Zaskar to Nubra, Shyok valley, Saser Kangri base, Pangong lake, Lamayuru to Padam and over Umasi la to Kishtawar.
<i>Article 23, p. 232</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 37, p. 101</i> | Over 10 high passes in 60 days, 520 km trek |
| 11. May 1981 | The Swetvarn Indo-French Expedition.
<i>Article 5, p. 80</i>
<i>H.J. Vol 38, p. 84</i> | Climbed Koteswar II (5690 m) (first ascent). Attempted Yogeshwar (6678 m) within 300 m |

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|-------------------|--|--|
| | | of the summit. The expedition also made first ascents of Sudarshan Parbat, Chaturbhuj, Saife and Koteswar I. |
| 12. December 1981 | Winter Expedition to Dhaulā Dhar.
<i>Article 16, p. 172</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 38, p. 181</i> | Climbed Yada and Jalsu peaks. |
| 13. May 1982 | The Darma Valley Expedition.
<i>Article 9, p. 121</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 39, p. 36</i> | Across 3 valleys and 2 high passes, 307 km trek. |
| 14. July 1983 | The Decennial Expedition to Lingti Valley. (Spiti).
<i>Article 19, p. 191</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 40, p. 96</i> | Climbed Lagma (5761 m), Zumto (c. 5800 m), Tserip (c. 5980 m) and Kawu (c. 5910 m). The expedition also climbed Sibu. All first ascent. |
| 15. December 1983 | The Winter Expedition to Kailash (Mani Mahesh).
<i>Article 15, p. 167</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 40, p. 186</i> | Trekking around Kailash in winter, crossing Chobu pass (c. 4900 m). |
| 16. June 1984 | The Ruinsara Youth Expedition.
<i>Article 6, p. 94</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 41, p. 61</i> | Climbed Bandarpunch West (6102 m) (first ascent) and Kalanag (6387 m). The expedition also climbed Barasukha, Chhotanag and Ruinsara. |
| 17. June 1985 | The Siachen Indo-British Expedition.
<i>Article 24, p. 245</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 42, p. 68</i> | The expedition explored the unknown Terong valley.
Expedition Climbed: Rimo III, Sondhi, Sundbrar, Doab, Safina, Chorten, and Ngabong Terong—all first ascents. Two other |

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|----------------------|---|---|
| | | peaks were attempted and 5 new cols reached. |
| 18. May 1986 | The Kinnaur-Kulu Expedition.
<i>Article 18, p. 181</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 43, p. 68</i> | Trekking in Baspa and Ropa valleys. The expedition climbed Manirang South (5888 m). |
| 19. July 1987 | The Lingti Valley Expedition.
<i>Article 20, p. 205</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 44, p. 96</i> | Climbed Parilunghi (6166 m) (second ascent), Runse (6175 m) Gyadung (6160 m), Geling (c. 6100 m), Lama Kyent (c. 6040 m) and Labrang (c. 5900 m) (first ascents). |
| 20. June 1988 | The Girthi Ganga Expedition.
<i>Article 2, p. 43</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 45, p. 53</i> | 300 km trek across Central Garhwal and Kumaon reaching Gupt Khal, Unta Dhura and Danu Dhura. |
| 21. July-August 1989 | The Chong Kumdan Expedition to East Karakoram.
<i>Article 25, p. 264</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 46, p. 76</i> | Explored Aq Tash and Chong Kumdan glacier across Saser la. Expedition Climbed: Lokhzung, Chathung Thung, Chogam, Stos and Skyang—all first ascents. |
| 22. May-June 1990 | The Trimukhi Parbat Expedition (Mana gad)
<i>Article 1, p. 27</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 47, p. 42</i> | Climbed 'Nandi' (5795 m)—first ascent. Explored 'Saraswati Col' (5900 m). The team also climbed Trimukhi Parbat East (6280 m)—first ascent. |
| 23. July-August 1991 | The Chong Kumdan Indo-British Expedition.
<i>Article 26, p. 282</i>
<i>H.J. Vol. 48, p. 97</i> | Climbed Laknis (6235 m) (first ascent), Chogam (6250 m), Skyang (5770 m). Expedition climbed Chong Kumdan (7071 m) and 6 other peaks. |

24. May-June 1992	The Indian-British Panch Chuli Expedition. <i>H.J. Vol. 49, p. 57</i>	Climbed Panchali Chuli (5220 m) and Draupadi (5250 m) (first ascents). Expedition climbed Panch Chuli II, Rajram -bha and Panch Chuli V. Climbed Khamengar (5760 m), (second ascent crossed Pin-Parvati and South Ratang passes. Expedition climbed Parahio peak.
25. July-August 1993	The Kullu-Spiti-Lahul Expedition. <i>H.J. Vol. 50, p. 116</i>	

B. Trekking

1. May 1963 Pindari Glacier (Kumaon)
2. June 1964 Har-Ki-Doon-Ruinsara (Garhwal)
3. April 1965 Muktinath (West Nepal)
4. May 1966 Rupkund-Gona tal (Garhwal)
5. April 1971 Sach pass (Chamba)
6. June 1971 Khanpari-Brighu Lake (Manali)
7. May 1972 Everest Base Camp (Nepal)
8. June 1973 Hampta pass-Lahul (Kulu)
9. July 1975 Liddar valley (Kashmir)
10. December 1976 Khajjar Winter trek (Chamba)
11. February 1976 Triund-Mon pass (Dhaura Dhar)
12. September 1977 Mon pass (Dhaura Dhar)
13. September 1978 Mon pass (Dhaura Dhar)
14. September 1979 Chamba to Dharamsala (Dhaura Dhar)
Article 17, p. 175
15. October 1982 Bhillangna valley (Garhwal)
16. November 1986 Kulti valley (Lahul)
Article 14, p. 163
H.J. Vol. 43, p. 39
17. August 1990 Shingo la—Phirtse la (Zaskar)
Article 22, p. 221
H.J. Vol 47, p. 99

334 *Appendices*

18. August 1992

Madhyamaheshwar—Kedarnath
(Garhwal)

H.J. Vol. 50, p. 214

19. May 1993

Sorang—Rupi valley (Kinnaur)

H.J. Vol. 50, p. 199

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